



Two-Year Monitoring of Hate Speech  
in the Lebanese Media and Social Media  
2022 – 2020

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THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

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# Introduction



# Introduction

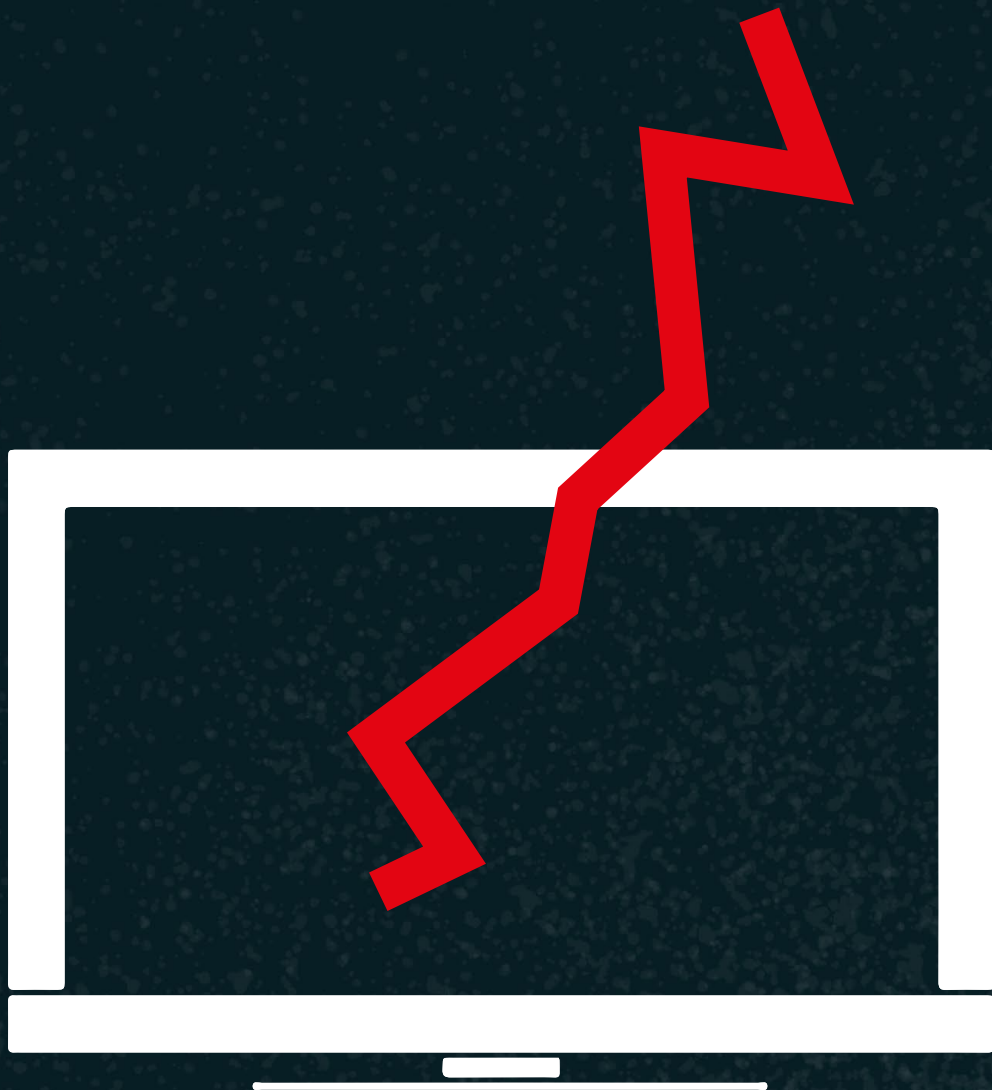
It is customary to distance and dissociate ourselves from hate, a sentiment widely perceived as negative, denounced by religions and moral philosophies and global social norms. However, hate is not merely a sentiment, or more precisely, its most dangerous form is not, but is rather a thought process and a political tool. And it is in the political sphere where hate becomes disruptive of every aspect of human connection and metastasizes to the point where disaster and tragedy become its inevitable result. Hate in politics is absolute, merciless and does not negotiate. Political discourse that is built on the hateful perception of a certain group or idea oftentimes becomes too powerful to contain once it possesses the collective mindset of a certain population or group of people. What is equally disturbing is its power to transform individuals into hate-mongering machines and to use this collective influence to set the stage for violence. This discourse is hate speech. It is global, widespread, and dangerous. It should not go unnoticed and it should be flagged and combatted with every available resource. History, near and far, bears witness to the catastrophic impact of hate speech on populations of all denominations.

Hate speech requires a medium to grow. Similarly to other narratives, it flourishes, gains a wider audience and becomes unapologetic when it is mainstreamed, and the fine line that separates it from free speech becomes purposefully blurred. The media is the ideal platform to mainstream hate speech and the more established and institutionalised the media is, the more it contributes to whitewashing hate speech. While for many, it is self-evident and a “no-brainer” that hate speech is the kind of narrative that respectable media should not associate itself with, the reality speaks a different tone. Hate speech is not a taboo, as it should be. It is not even a topic of debate. There are no flags raised nor alarms sounded when a guest slips up, or intentionally makes a hateful comment against a group of people. In this sense, the media in Lebanon is home to a growing and systematic politics of hate speech. In talk shows and interviews, the media often provides airtime and audience to personalities that are famous for injecting hate speech, and watches in silence as they infect the collective consciousness of a nation. On the other hand, social media has grown in penetration to the point where it has become an attractive platform for systematic hate speech campaigns.

In Lebanon, hate speech is increasingly becoming a systematic approach to influencing public opinion and its perception of people, groups and politics. Several incidents of violence in recent years demonstrate the link between hate speech campaigns and political assassinations, for example. In September 2021, the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKF) published a study about the hate networks that surrounded Lebanese writer, researcher and political activist Loqman Slim before his assassination. The study zoomed in on the Twitter landscape in the period around his assassination and collected concrete digital evidence of the existence of elaborate hate networks that targeted him until after his death; the intent was obvious, and the hate was organized.

Combatting “organized” hate requires a better understanding of how it is organized and a mapping of its key drivers, targets and operators. This implies that long-term listening to a wide range of platforms and an even wider range of circulation points is required. In December 2020, SKF embarked on a two-year effort to take a closer look at hate speech campaigns, the circumstances that surround the them, their targets, sympathizers, perpetrators and the patterns that these campaigns take. This effort focused on three major media platforms: television, Facebook and Twitter. A tailored methodology was developed for each of the platforms and a separate study was conducted, in consultation with the Media Diversity Institute. This report focuses on the key lessons learned out the research from all three platforms. Each section of this report covers one platform and contains an overview of the landscape as it pertains to that platform, the specific methodology used in the research, and the findings. The study is part of a larger project titled “Inclusive Media, Cohesive Society” (IMeCS), which aims at sensitising the media against hate speech, building the capacity of independent media outlets and expanding the coverage of news media to include marginalised groups.

# Television



# Television

*Researched and authored by Widad Jarboun*

Intolerant and exclusionary speech is being systematically used to serve a narrative that marginalises and discriminates against the “other” along sectarian and other divisive lines. Therefore, it is crucial to shed light on the use of hateful narratives to promote political agendas and to develop a more ethical and responsible guiding framework for users, producers, and commentators.

## Methodology

The first step involved reviewing all reports related to marginalised groups (such as women/gender equality, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ community, refugees/displaced persons, foreign workers, religious/ethnic groups) in the selected media outlets to determine whether these groups received equal coverage or were entirely ignored. During the monitored period, 24 reports were issued. The second step involved monitoring the number of hate speech incidents against these groups, including the behavior of guests and hosts.

The content of the main news bulletins and talk shows of seven Lebanese TV channels was monitored from December 2020 to November 2022, covering the first seven days of each month.

The TV channels included in the study are:

- Al Manar
- OTV
- NBN
- LBCI
- MTV
- Al Jadeed
- Télé Liban

All monitored content during this period was entered into a database, which included the:

- Title
- Date
- URL
- Section: main news bulletins or talk shows
- Marginalised groups
- Number of hate speech incidents
- Political affiliation of the hate speech instigator
- Social group of the hate speech instigator
- Host behavior
- Guest behavior
- Political affiliation of guest
- Social group of guest

## News Bulletins – Monitoring Results

The ongoing political, health, and economic/financial crises in Lebanon were the dominant topics in the main news bulletins across all seven TV channels. The headlines revolved around the economic crisis, lifting subsidies on basic commodities, seizing the Lebanese depositors' money, the dollar scarcity crisis, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the gradual deterioration of power supply, and the increased security fears amidst the multiple crises.

As these multifaceted crises in Lebanon rapidly intensified, they overshadowed all other narratives in the media, leading to increased tensions in several regions. In this context, it was crucial for the media to shed light on the reality and needs of marginalised groups, who were among the first victims of the deteriorating living conditions.

Therefore, monitoring the media space given to the marginalised groups was important, as exclusion from coverage is also a form of marginalisation.

In the two-year monitoring period, only 167 reports out of a total of 21,069 in the main news bulletins on the TV channels included in the study tackled marginalised groups (as shown in *Figure 1*). This percentage is considered very low, with coverage of marginalised groups' issues representing only 0.79%.

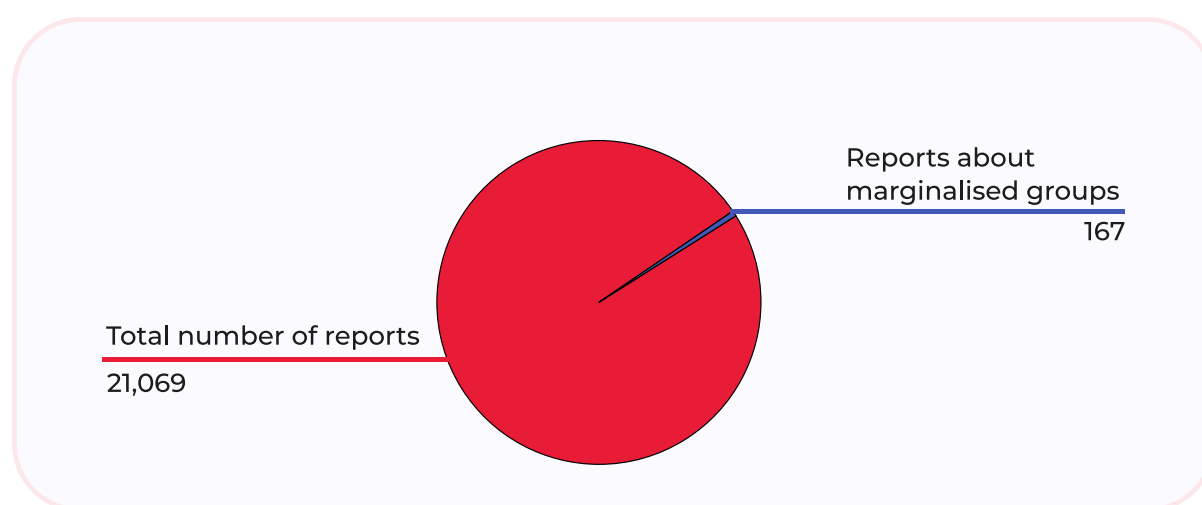


Fig. 1: Number of reports about marginalised groups out of the total number of reports

*Figure 2* illustrates the breakdown of the number of reports on marginalised groups during the two-year monitoring period of the main news bulletins broadcasted on the seven TV channels. The highest number of reports on marginalised groups was published by *MTV*, with 31 out of 167 reports (19%). *Télé Liban* and *OTV* followed closely behind with 29 reports each (17%), followed by *Al Jadeed* with 24 reports (15%), *NBN* with 22 reports (13%), *LBCI* with 18 reports (11%), and finally *Al Manar* with the lowest number of reports at 14 (8%).

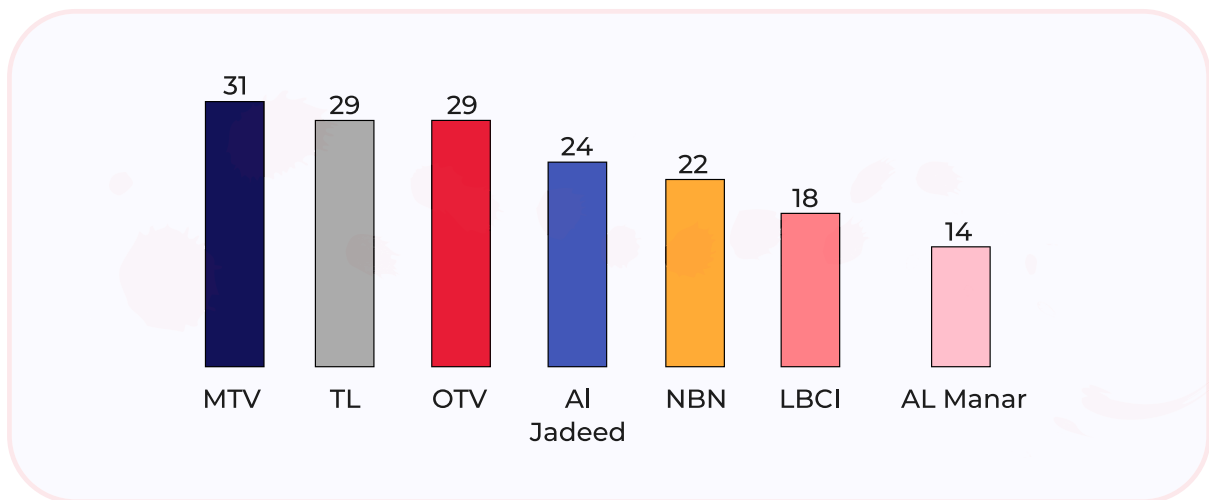


Fig. 2: Number of reports about marginalised groups per TV channel

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of coverage per marginalised group. Reports related to refugees ranked first (71 out of 167; 43%), followed by women (44 reports; 26%), people with disabilities (14 reports; 25%), and foreign workers (11 reports; 6%). Notably, no reports were aired in the news bulletins during the monitored period about the LGBTQIA+ community.

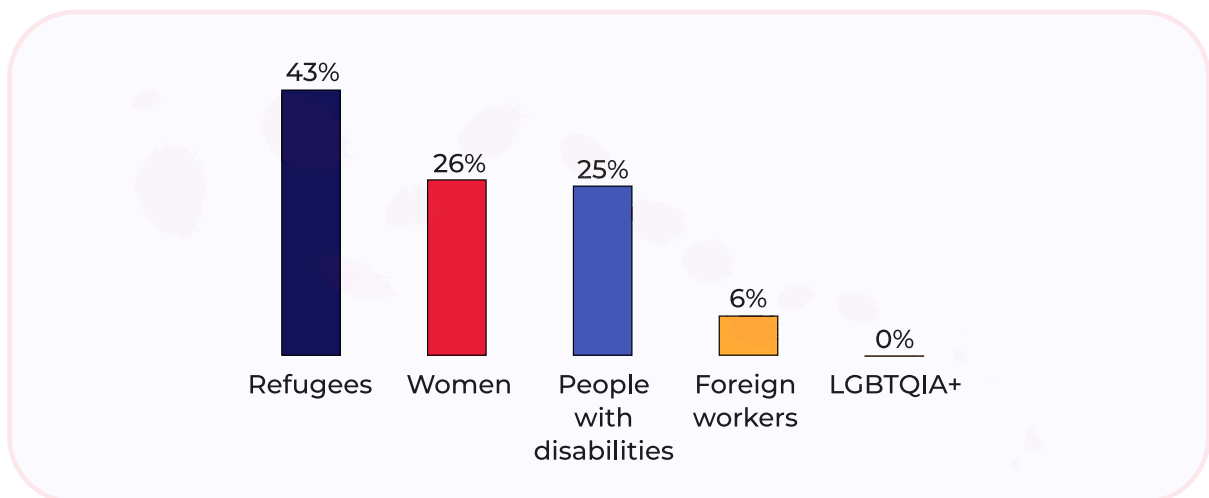


Fig 3: Coverage per each marginalised group

It is worth noting that the number of reports covering certain marginalised groups increased during special occasions, such as International Women's Day or International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

## Media Coverage Distribution of Marginalised Groups

MTV covered women's issues in 12 out of its 31 reports, representing 39% of the total number (as shown in *Figure 4*). The channel covered people with disabilities in eight reports (26%), refugees in seven reports (22%), and foreign workers in four reports (13%).

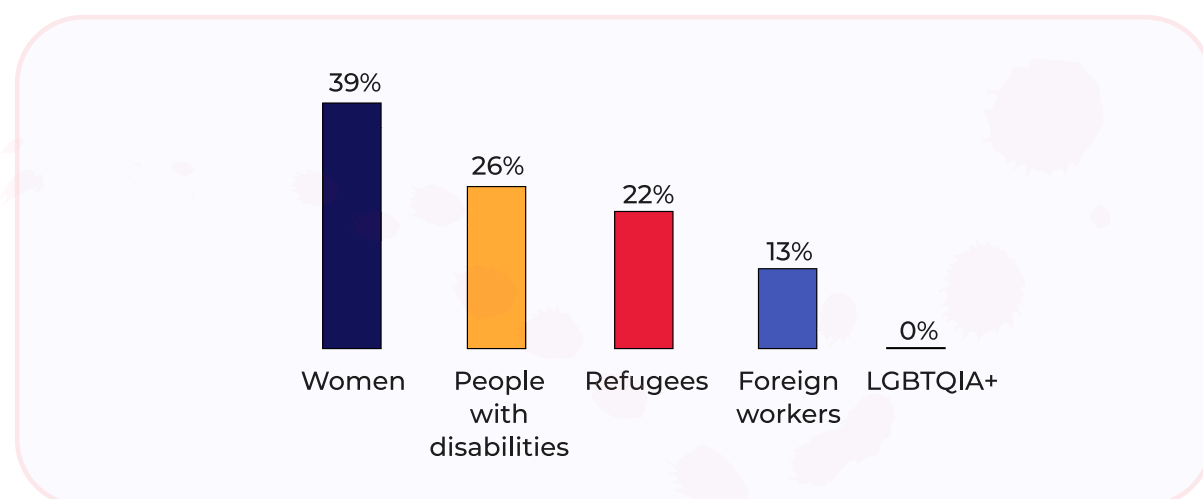


Fig. 4: Marginalised groups coverage in the MTV reports

Regarding *Télé Liban*, 16 out of its 29 reports tackled refugees and displaced people (55%), eight reports were related to women (28%), and five (17%) to people with disabilities (as shown in *Figure 5*).

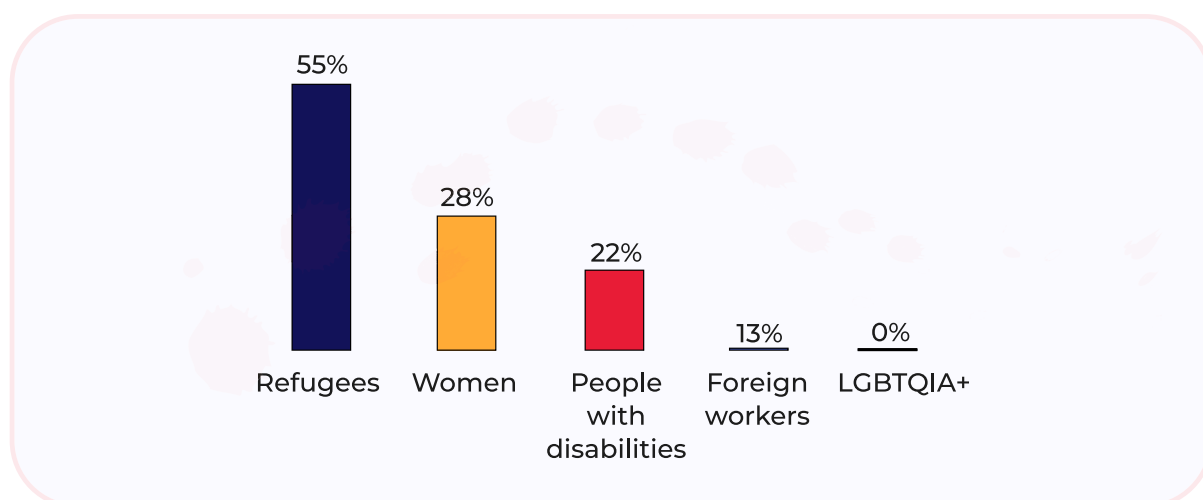


Fig. 5: Coverage of marginalised groups in *Télé Liban* reports

As for OTV, 14 out of the 29 reports were about refugees and displaced people (49%), nine were about women (31%), three were about foreign workers (10%), and three were about people with disabilities (10%) (as shown in *Figure 6*).

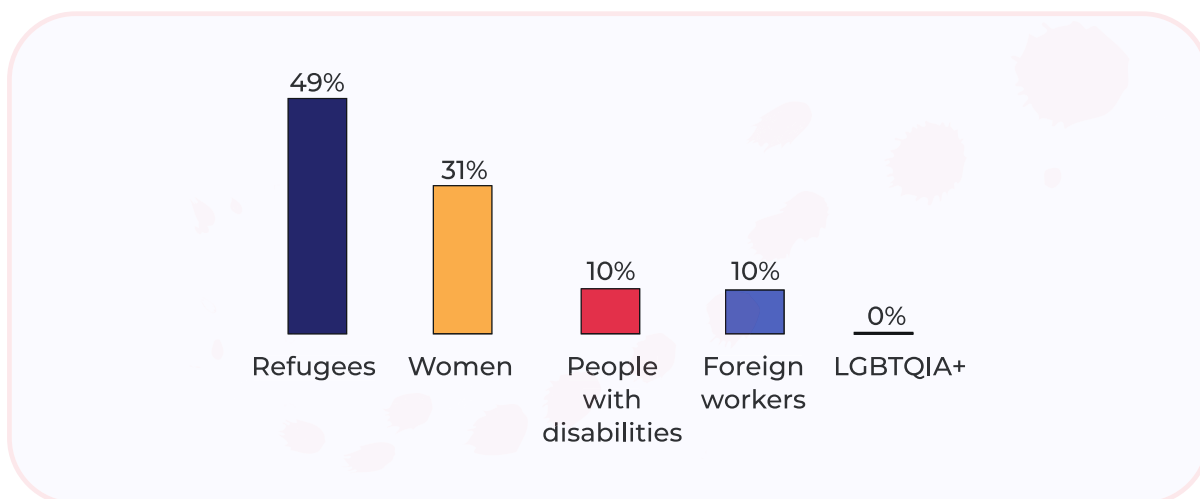


Fig. 6: Coverage of marginalised groups in OTV reports

*Al Jadeed* published 24 reports on marginalised groups, of which 12 were related to refugees (50%), six were related to people with disabilities (25%), five were related to women (21%), and one report was related to foreign workers, accounting for 4% of the total number (as shown in *Figure 7*).

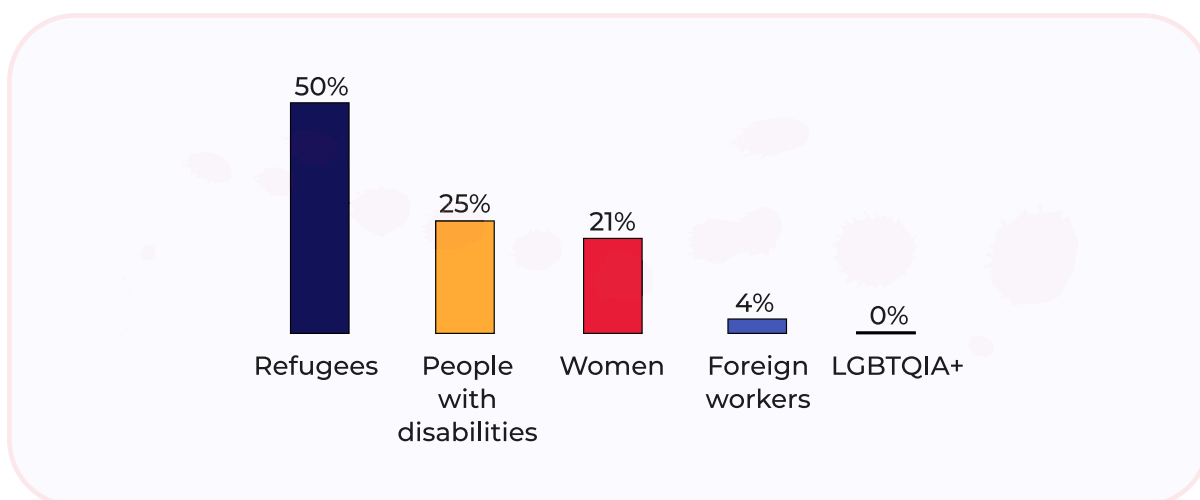


Fig. 7: Coverage of marginalised groups in *Al Jadeed* reports

*NBN* covered refugees and displaced persons in 12 out of 22 reports (54%), people with disability in eight reports (36%), women in one report (5%), and also foreign workers in one report (5%) (as shown in *Figure 8*).

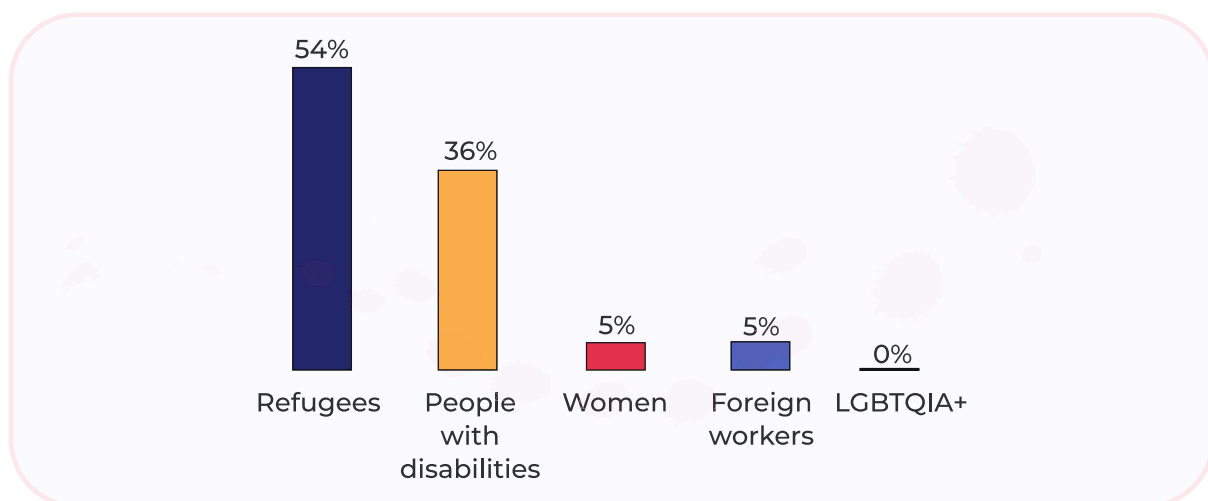


Fig. 8: Coverage of marginalised groups in NBN reports

LBCI dedicated six out of 18 reports to people with disabilities (33%), five to women (28%), five to refugees (28%), while two reports (11%) tackled foreign workers (as shown in Figure 9).

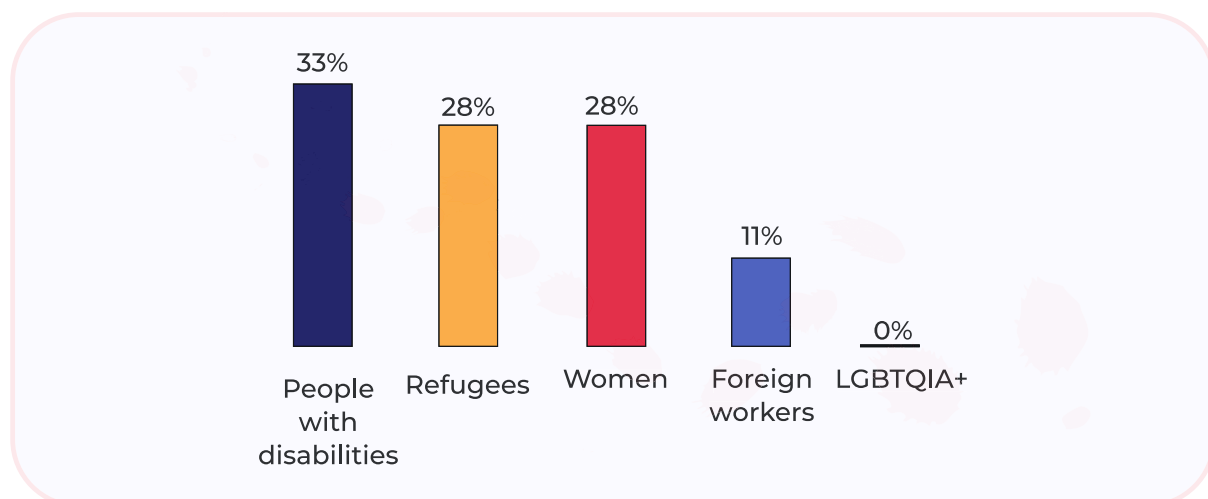


Fig. 9: Coverage of marginalised groups in LBCI reports

Al Manar published the lowest number of reports related to marginalised groups: five out of 14 were about refugees (36%), five were about people with disabilities (also 36%), and four (28%) were about women (as shown in Figure 10).

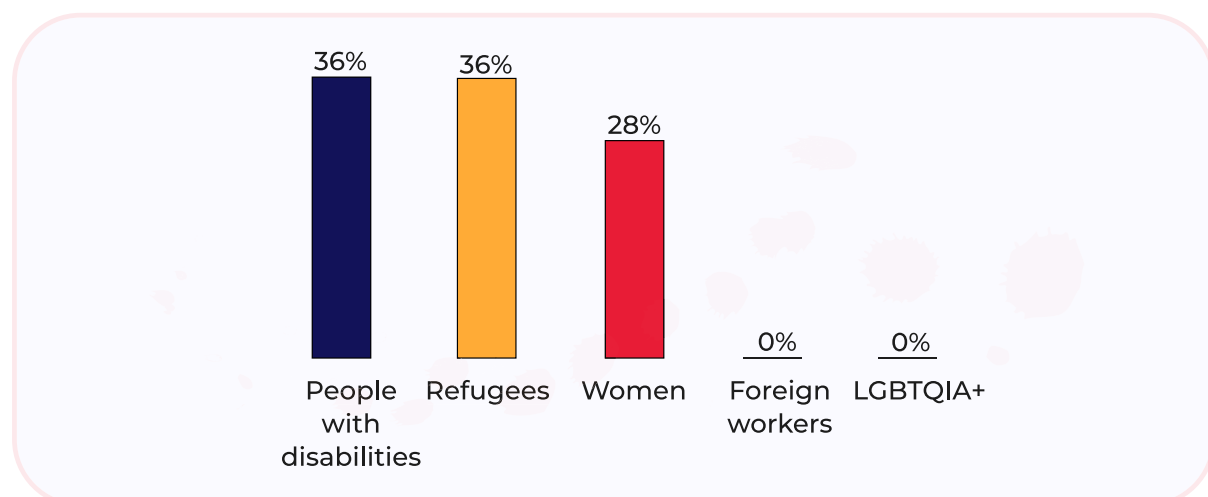


Fig. 10: Coverage of marginalised groups in Al Manar reports

## Problematic Content and Hate Speech in News Bulletins

It is important to note that while the Lebanese media is not solely responsible for creating hate speech, it does contribute to the harmful rhetoric, particularly when it comes to Syrian refugees. This is rooted in the Lebanese society's perception of Syrian refugees as responsible for the country's deteriorating situation. Similar incitement campaigns have been observed [against the LGBTQIA+ community](#). Hate speech against Syrian refugees in Lebanon has risen due to the poor management of this contentious issue over the years. During the monitoring period, officials and political parties held Syrian refugees responsible for the crises in the country and repeatedly called for their return to Syria, thus scapegoating them and shirking responsibility.

Hate speech and problematic content were particularly evident during prime-time news bulletins, either directly from the journalists or through interviews conducted with citizens, lawyers, or politicians.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of hate speech or problematic content across the seven TV channels. *Télé Liban*, *Al Jadeed*, and *LBCI* each aired three out of the 12 reports containing hate speech against marginalised groups (25% each). *OTV* aired two reports (17%), while *MTV* aired one (8%). *Al Manar* and *NBN* did not air any hate speech or problematic content against marginalised groups in the monitored sample.

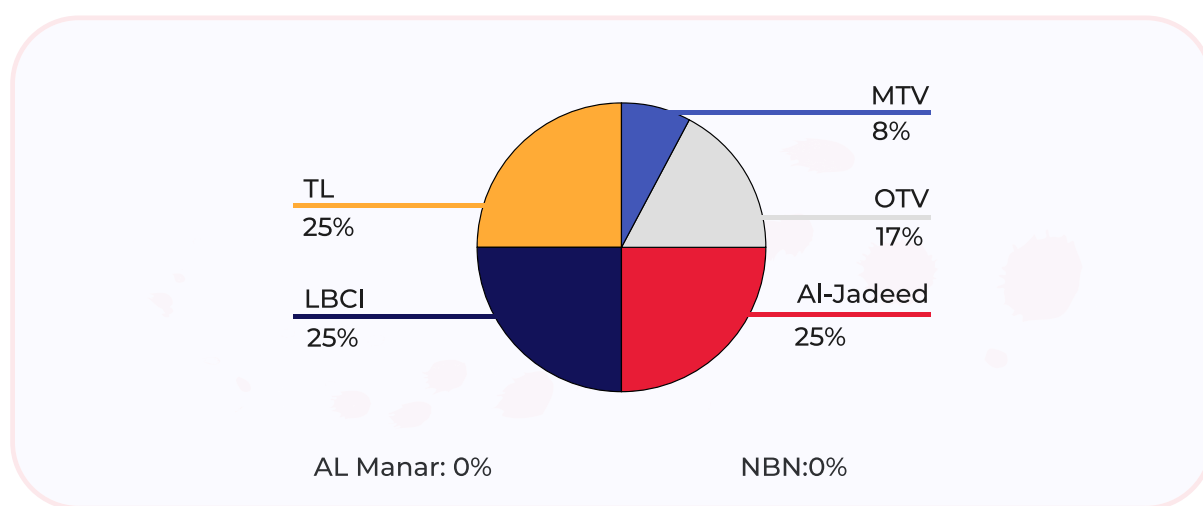


Fig. 11: Hate speech distribution across TV channels

Figure 12 displays the distribution of hate speech by marginalised group. Out of the 12 reports including hate speech, six were directed towards refugees (50%), five towards women (41%), and one towards foreign workers (9%). It is important to note that during the monitored period, no hate speech was used against people with disabilities or the LGBTQIA+ community. Furthermore, the latter's issues and needs were clearly marginalised as none of the seven TV channels covered the subject during the relevant period.

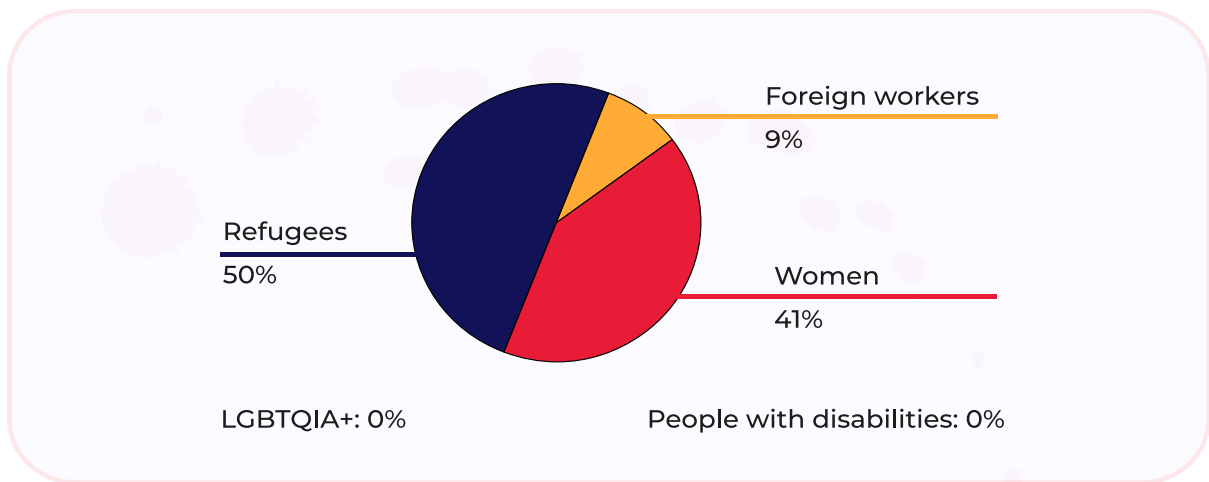


Fig. 12: Hate speech distribution by marginalised group

## Focus on Problematic TV Content

**LBCI:** In a [report](#) about foreign workers, it was noted that “foreigners represent 80% of the workforce in Lebanon, whereas Lebanese people are facing difficult living conditions and a high unemployment rate.” The report holds foreign workers responsible for the rise in the unemployment rate and the economic crisis in Lebanon, while turning a blind eye to the fundamental economic and political reasons. Also, the report does not mention any credible source to prove that the abovementioned number is valid. The content of this report could spread hate speech and hostile reactions against foreign workers.

**Télé Liban:** Former Lebanese Forces MP Eddy Abillama and his lawyer Elie Mahfoud filed a complaint against Syrian citizen Mohammad Kamal Al-Labwani, who encouraged Syrian refugees to form an armed militia in Lebanon after a Syrian refugee camp was set on fire in northern Lebanon. During an [interview](#) on *Télé Liban*’s prime-time news, Mahfoud stated: “We filed a lawsuit against a person who claimed that all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are armed and have two million rifles.” Mahfoud gave credence to Al-Labwani’s claims, referring to all Syrian refugees as members of an armed militia who bear/are ready to bear guns and rifles against the Lebanese people. The content of the interview was considered inflammatory speech (so were Al-Labwani’s statements) and could lead to aggressive reactions against refugees/displaced people, knowing that hostility towards Syrian refugees is growing in Lebanon.

**Télé Liban:** A [report](#) on Syrian refugees in Lebanon stated that “the issue is a burden on Lebanon both economically and socially” and that “aid to refugees is in foreign currency, while the country is facing a critical financial situation,” which creates tensions between the refugees and the Lebanese people who are mainly suffering from the dollar scarcity. The report also shed light on the impact of refugees on infrastructure.

**OTV:** During the [prime-time news bulletin](#), the following statement was included: “The uncontrolled Palestinian weapons alone did not disturb the foundations of the State, but rather the Lebanese people who collaborated with these weapons, paving the road to war and exposing the Palestinian cause to danger, and Lebanon to the risk of settlement. The experience could be repeated with the Syrian displacement.” This problematic speech by OTV suggests that the scenario of war, weapons, and the risk of resettlement that occurred with Palestinian refugees can be repeated with Syrian refugees. The generalisation in the comparison implies a negative attitude towards refugees and displaced people. This political position is consistent with the stance of the Free Patriotic Movement, the political party to which OTV is affiliated.

**Al Jadeed:** A [report](#) on Al Jadeed TV focused on Syrian deposits in Lebanese banks, along with a statement by Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad claiming that Syrians have between 20 to 42 billion dollars blocked in Lebanese banks. However, the reporter soon used problematic rhetoric against Syrian refugees. “Syrian displacement drained the Lebanese economy during the Syrian war,” the reporter said, before quoting President Michel Aoun: “Syrian refugees cost the Lebanese economy 40 billion dollars.” The Syrian crisis has undoubtedly affected the already fragile Lebanese economy. However, it is essential to consider the context of the reporter’s statement. He used inflammatory language, portraying Syrian refugees as the primary reason for the collapse of the Lebanese economy, exempting the Lebanese authorities and President from accountability by merely repeating the latter’s claim. The President’s attempt to shift the blame away from his administration and its failure to meet its responsibilities by pointing fingers at marginalised groups has received unwarranted support.

**Al Jadeed, Télé Liban, OTV, MTV, and LBCI:** On June 7, 2022, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri made a statement that was published by all five channels after MP Paula Yacoubian suggested holding a legislative session to discuss and vote on amending Decree 6433 related to Lebanon’s maritime borders. Berri used misogynistic language and invoked details of Yacoubian’s personal life during the political and legal debate, saying: “Where was Paula 12 years ago when I was talking about the oil revolution? She was not married yet. But I won’t say anything because her husband is a friend.” None of the channels provided any commentary on Berri’s words; they simply published the statement along with other arguments made during the session.

**Al Jadeed:** In a [report](#) about Syrian taxi drivers competing with Lebanese drivers, a Lebanese driver used the phrase “The Syrians ate us” to suggest that their increasing numbers were resulting in job competition.

**LBCI:** A [report](#) was published on the conflict that erupted among Syrian refugees in the Karak area of the Beqaa valley, during which heavy gunfire resulted in the death of a Lebanese citizen. Residents of the area destroyed cars and property belonging to the refugees, and one resident was interviewed saying, “Every Syrian in the area deserves death,” which is a direct death threat and incitement to violence against refugees.

## Talk Show Monitoring Results

In Lebanon, the prime-time shows mainly focused on the political, economic, and health crises, while marginalised groups were largely ignored. The monitored shows include “It’s About Time” (MTV), “Vision 2030” (LBCI), “Now What” (Al Jadeed), “The Fourth Estate” (NBN), “Talk of the Hour” (Al Manar), “Lebanon Today” (Télé Liban), and “Dialogue of the Day” (OTV). Of the 415 subjects addressed over the two-year monitoring period, only nine were related to marginalised groups (as shown in Figure 13). This represents a notably low ratio compared to the total number of subjects covered.

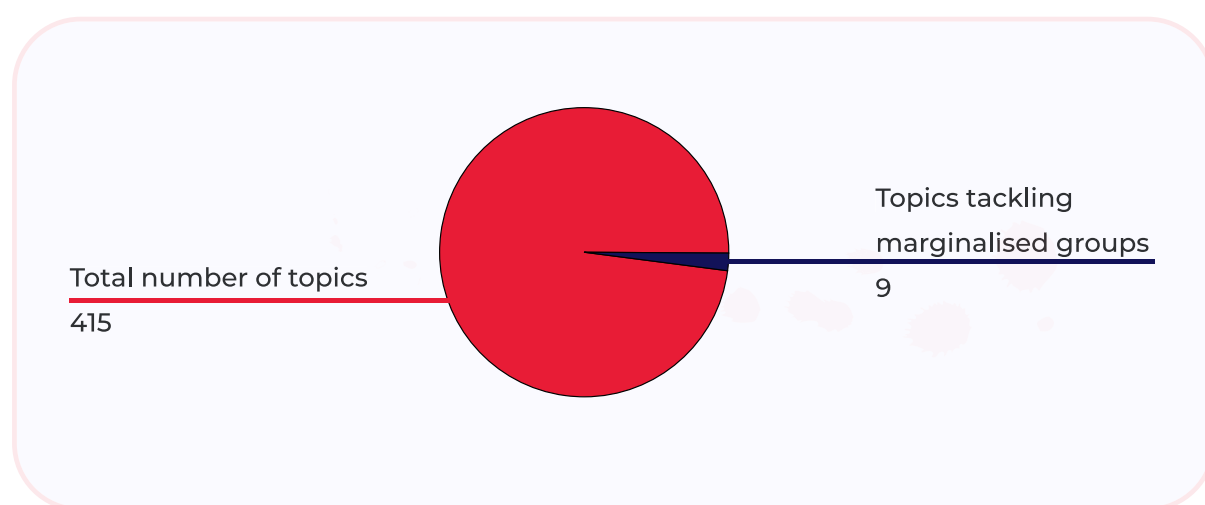


Fig. 13: Number of topics related to marginalised groups

Figure 14 displays the number of reports concerning marginalised groups on all seven channels during the main talk shows. Once again, MTV ranked first with eight out of nine reports (89%), followed by Télé Liban with one report (11%). The other talk shows did not address marginalised groups during the monitored period.

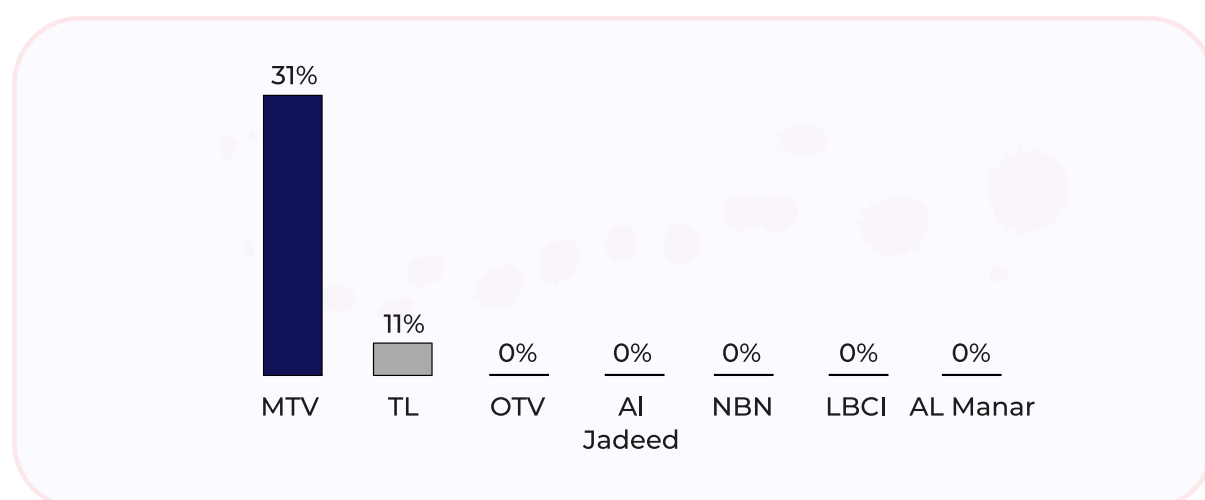


Fig. 14: Number of topics related to marginalised groups per channel

Figure 15 displays the percentage of coverage for each marginalised group. Topics related to people with disabilities received the most coverage with four out of nine reports (45%), followed by women with three reports (33%) and refugees with two reports (22%). No reports about the LGBTQIA+ community and foreign workers were published during the monitored period.

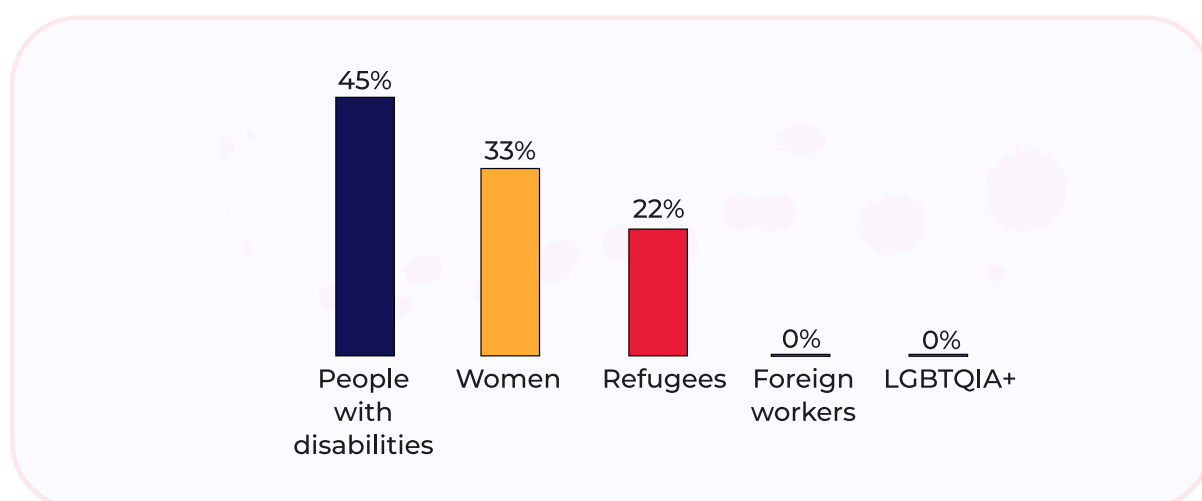


Fig. 15: Percentage of coverage by marginalised group

## Problematic Content and Hate Speech in Talk Shows

MTV: During a debate around the power crisis in Lebanon on MTV's ["It's About Time"](#) talk show, then-resigned independent MP Paula Yacoubian and Free Patriotic Movement MP Hikmat Dib engaged in a heated debate. Dib used sexist and misogynistic language, telling Yacoubian: "Don't be upset; you're not beautiful when you're angry." He added: "I am a real activist when it comes to the departure of the Syrian troops from the country, sovereignty, freedom and independence. I don't know on whose lap you were sitting at the time." However, it is worth noting that the show's host, Marcel Ghanem, called out Dib's behavior and rejected his statement.

## Ignoring the LGBTQIA+ Community

The seven channels completely ignored LGBTQIA+ related issues, failing to publish a single report related to their needs and the challenges they face. All news bulletins and prime-time shows neglected the community's issues during the monitored period. The design of the monitoring process accounted for the potential need for *ad-hoc* monitoring that looks into time periods that fall outside the monthly timeframes set in the methodology. Although this report has found that the LGBTQIA+ community has been completely neglected, SKF published a [special report](#) about the attack against the community and the incitement campaign aiming at intimidating its members and suppressing all activities and celebrations

organized during the month of June, known as “Pride Month.” The report was based on off-timeframe monitoring of the main news bulletins on the following channels: *MTV, LBCI, OTV, Télé Liban, Al Jadeed*, and *Al Manar*, as well as a number of Lebanese newspapers and news websites, namely *Addiyar, Annahar, Aliwaa, Nidaa Al Watan, Al Akhbar, Al Modon, Megaphone, Daraj*, and *Lebanon Files*.

Through this special report, SKF aimed to monitor and analyse the performance of the media in the coverage of this campaign and the attack against the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon. It also sought to identify the parties that are using hate speech and the media’s perception of community issues: do they see them as scandalous/moral, or do they consider them as human rights issues by definition? The monitored period was from June 24 to 27, 2022, when religious groups and political parties, as well as media institutions, began adopting inflammatory positions against the LGBTQIA+ community.

## Recommendations

- Rejecting inflammatory speech against marginalised groups or any kind of rhetoric that fuels hatred and violence should continue to expand and become more prevalent.
- A commitment to publishing more reports addressing the issues and needs of marginalised groups should be established, given the small percentage of reports broadcasted during the monitored period.
- Journalists and hosts in live talk shows have a responsibility to reject hate speech used by guests and make a clear and strong comment about it.
- Stereotypes must be avoided when addressing issues, especially when it comes to refugees and the LGBTQIA+ community. A human rights approach based on international resolutions and conventions, particularly the ones Lebanon has committed to honoring, should be used to protect and respect their rights.
- Providing more media space for the needs of marginalised groups and the challenges they face is vital. Ignoring these issues further marginalises the groups.
- Journalists should rely on official sources and agencies that provide accurate and reliable information and figures, without falling into the trap of exaggerated numbers and misinformation.
- The journalist must use objective methods, especially when holding the real parties responsible for the current crises, without conveying the populist statements used by several political parties that use human rights issues for political interests.
- It is necessary to broadcast more reports/topics addressing marginalised groups, particularly in talk shows, while promoting the participation of specialized guests including activists and human rights advocates.
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# Twitter



# Twitter

*Researched and authored by Jad Safwan*

Over the past two years, Lebanon has faced numerous crises. Residual feelings of resentment and hatred from the civil war era still run deep. Unable to come to terms with their past or with one another, many are quick to blame “the other” for their misfortunes, and soon enough, everyone becomes a minority. An increasingly oppressive government, as well as a pandemic that has kept a significant portion of the Lebanese population at home, made social media an even bigger outlet for frustrated Lebanese.

Initially, this study was planned to cover the period from December 2020 to November 2022. However, as the project progressed, so did the methodology. This report covers the period from February 2021 to November 2022, with a few months omitted due to either a lack of tweets or technical obstacles encountered during the project. A total of 20 out of 24 months were monitored, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of Lebanese Twitter.

The findings show that hashtags were not used as frequently as initially expected. A significant portion of the problematic rhetoric was propagated by actors who shared a similar profile but did not necessarily exhibit a strong network in every instance. The main identifiable instigators were profiles supporting Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), with the most active profiles being those of men, while women were targeted more often. Polarization discourse is high, and little room has been left for constructive conversation, resulting vulnerable populations of society being frequently used as scapegoats.

## Methodology

On the second week of each month, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup>, the top daily hashtags were monitored at precisely 10 a.m. In addition, a timeframe of 9:45 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. was selected, during which the top hashtags in Lebanon were evaluated. Only hashtags used in tweets containing problematic rhetoric were recorded each month.

Simultaneously, any tweets found outside this timeframe that displayed such rhetoric were noted, and an analysis of Twitter as a whole was conducted. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of what made this type of harmful discourse trending. The reports also briefly evaluated the topics covered, the profiles of the instigators, as well as the potential networks spreading the hashtags and/or tweets. Screenshots were included in each individual report to further demonstrate trends. To add another dimension to this study, both the inclusion and the exclusion of marginalised groups (women, refugees, LGBTQIA+, etc.) were treated as indicators from which findings could be obtained.

During the first two months of the project, manual human effort was used to scour Twitter for hate speech or other problematic rhetoric, with a focus on the hashtags. This method proved to be inefficient, as the massive amounts of tweets required a more systematic approach. In addition, the hashtags themselves did not play as big of a role as anticipated, and as a result, no tweets were recorded. This is one reason behind the slight shift in methodology after the first two months of monitoring (December 2020 - January 2021) and their exclusion.

Following this, SKF collaborated with a team of developers from Data Aurora to create a tool that would continuously, automatically, and in real time, collect tweets based on a set of keywords. The keywords were chosen by SKF and were primarily based on minorities in Lebanon, as well as journalists/media professionals, who have gradually been turned into scapegoats over the past few years.

Despite all the above, the tool alone was not enough. Researcher oversight remained imperative, as the tool's accuracy had limitations. Following the data collection, a round of human intervention was required to sift through thousands of tweets to find ones that fit the study's parameters. Tweets that fell outside the monthly monitoring dates were not included in the analysis in order to preserve its integrity. Consequently, this study should be regarded as more of a sampling rather than a comprehensive endeavor to capture every single tweet posted since the start of the project.

## Keywords

Women		+LGBTQ		Migrant Workers Refugees/	
EN	AR	EN	AR	EN	AR
Woman	المرأة	Fagot/Faggot	لوطي	Refugee	لاجئ
Women	النساء	Sodomy	لواط	Refugees	لاجئين
Women	حوا	Abnormal	شاذ	Camp	مخيم
Fornication	عهر	Abnormal	شاذة	Displaced	نازح
Whore	عاهرة	Abnormality	شذوذ	Palestinian	فلسطيني
Bitch	ساقطة	Homosexual	مثلي	Syrian	سوري
		Lesbian	ساقطة	Domestic Worker	عاملة منزل
		Gay	طبيجي	Domestic Workers	عاملات منزل
				Migrant Worker	عاملة أجنبي
				Migrant Workes	عمال أجنب
				Foreigner	أجنبي
				Foreigners	أجنب
				Servant	خادمي
				Servant	خادمة
				Sri Lankan	سرلنكية
				Homemaker	صانعة

Disabled		Race		Journalists/Media	
EN	AR	EN	AR	EN	AR
Retard	معاق	Slave	عبد	Media	اعلام
Disabled	معوق	Slaves	عبيد	Journalist	صحافي
Deranged	مختل	Nigger	زنبي	Journalism	صحافة
		Niggers	الزنوج	Strife	فتنة
				Inciting	تحريض
				Incite	يحرض
				Incite	تحرض
				Embassy	سفارة
				Embassy Shiites	شيعة سفارة
				Agent/Traitor	عميل
				Agents/Traitors	عملاء
				(just the Arabic version)	أمريكا

## Statistics

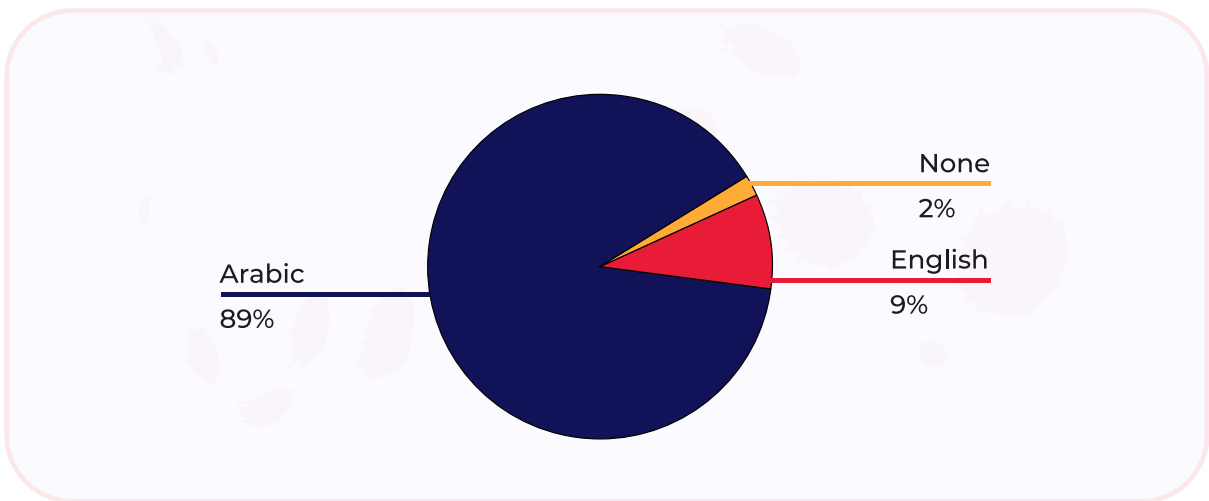


Fig. 16: Language of tweets

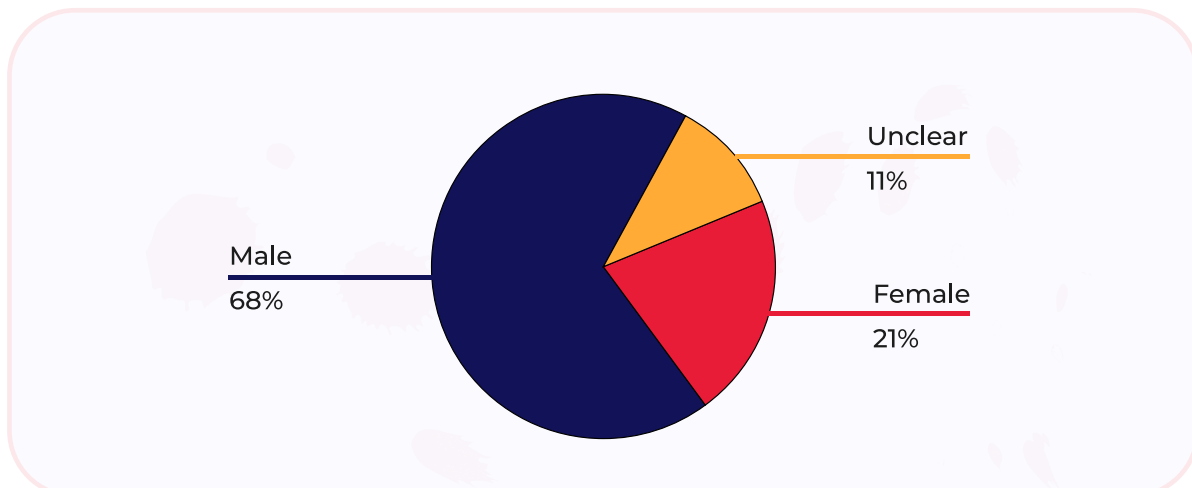


Fig. 17: Gender of author

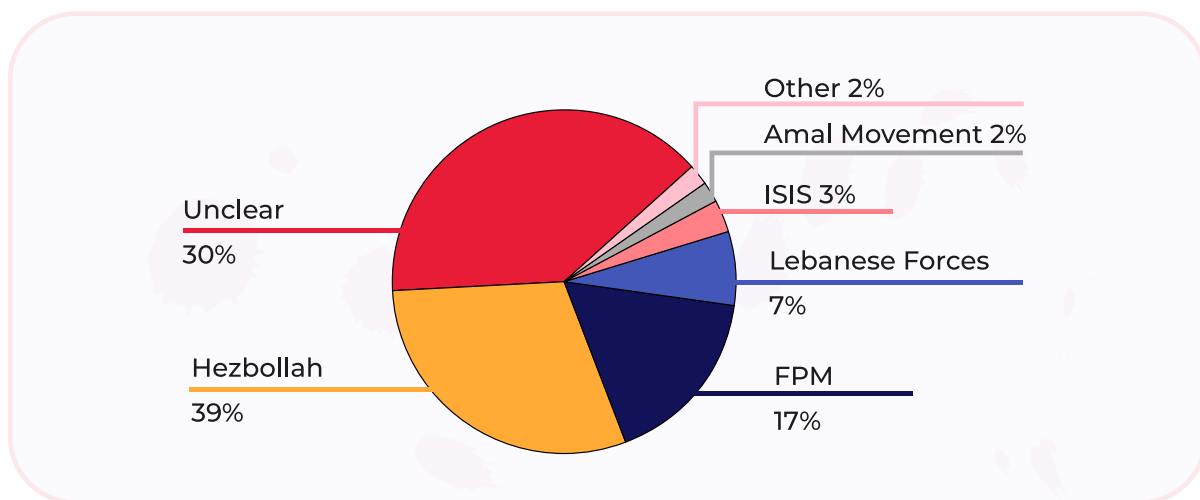


Fig. 18: Political affiliation of author

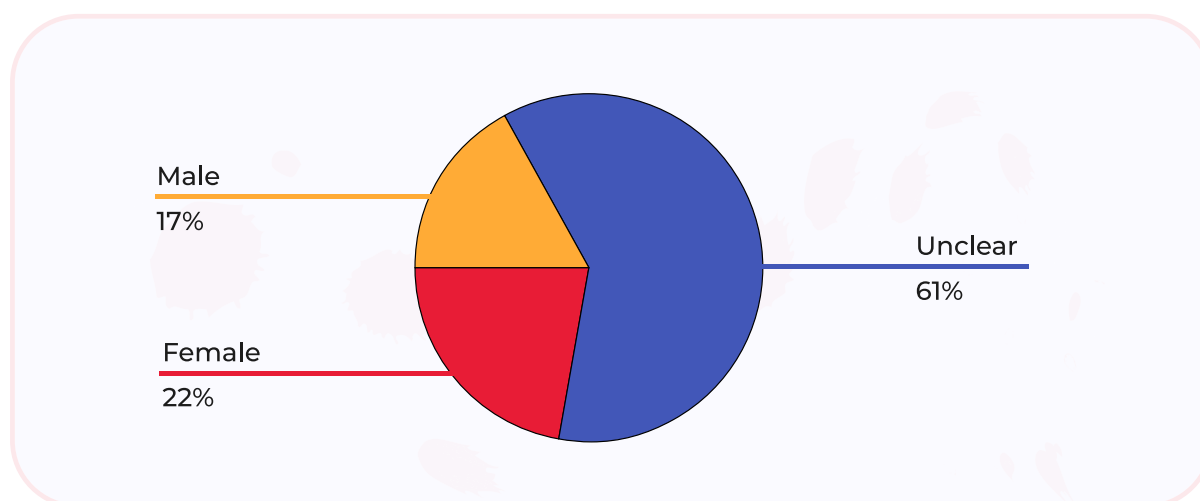


Fig. 19: Gender of target

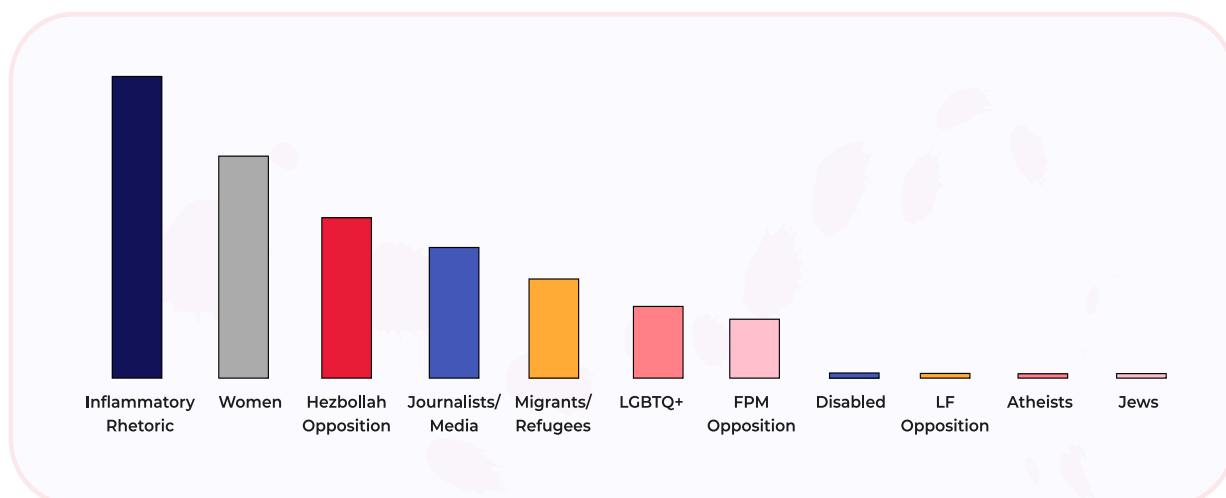


Fig. 20: Types of marginalised groups<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Inflammatory rhetoric: sectarian/hate-charged tweets that do not target any marginalised group in particular.

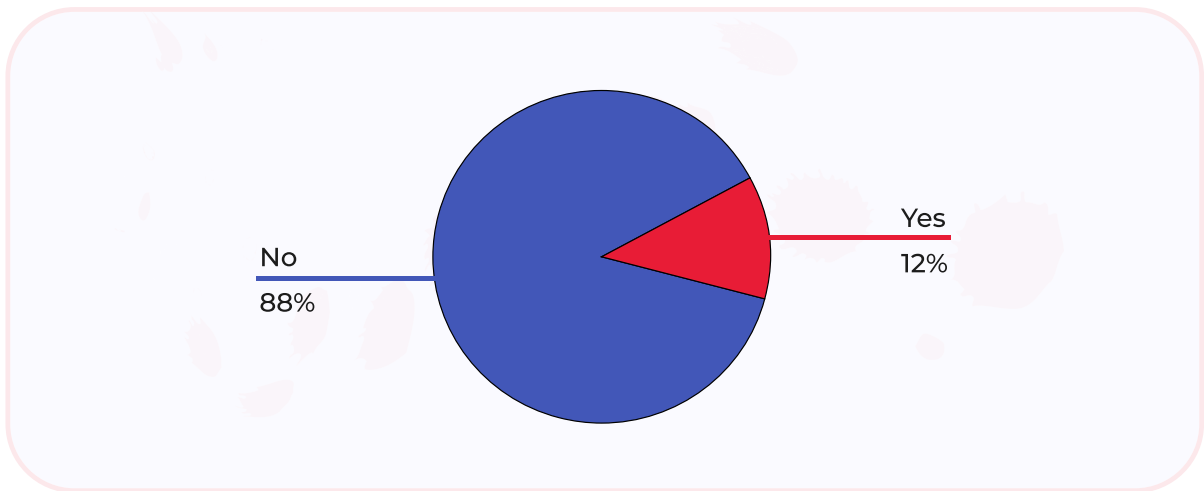


Fig. 21: Problematic tweets within trending timeframe

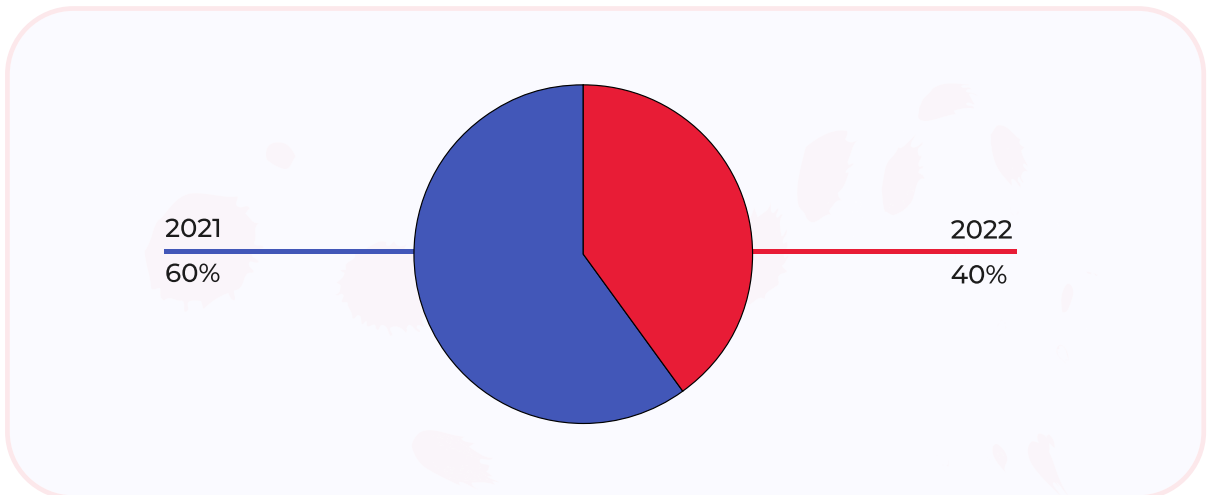


Fig. 22: Number of tweets by year

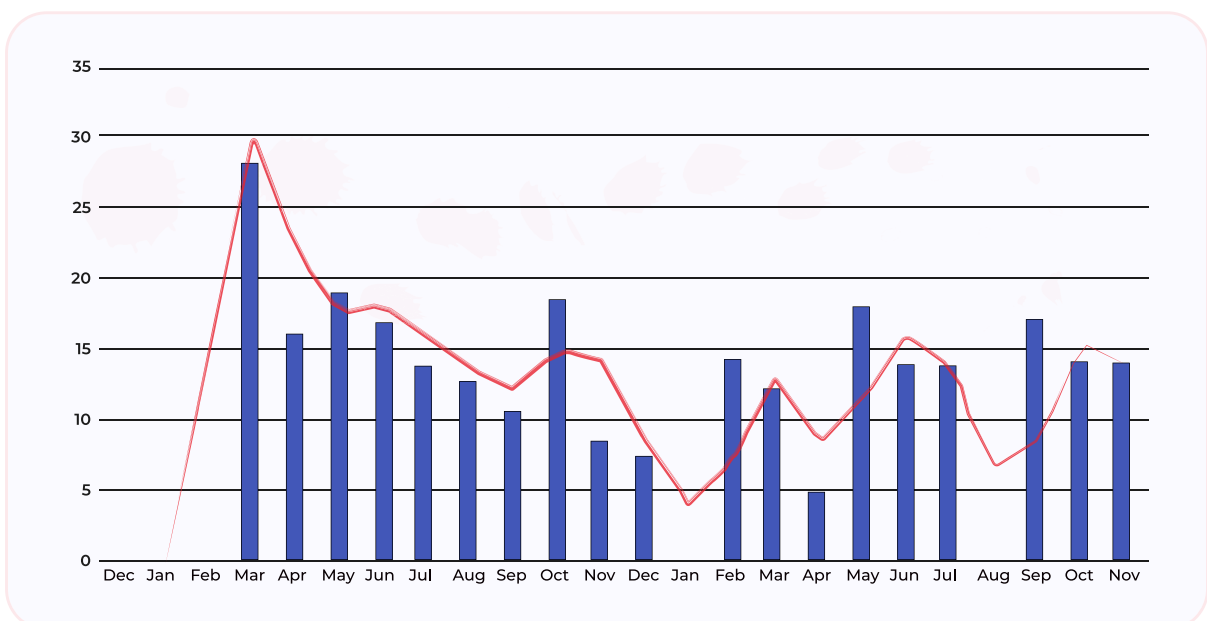


Fig. 23: Monthly progression and trend

## Key Insights

Despite using a keyword selection in both English and Arabic, the overwhelming majority of tweets monitored were in Arabic. Less than 2% of the tweets did not include any language as they were mostly images or emojis. These can easily be used to reinforce or even spread problematic rhetoric, as shown in *Figure 24* below.



Fig. 24

Gender also played a pivotal role in this observation, as men constituted the majority of spreaders at 68%, while 21% were women, and 11% of the tweets were authored by accounts where the gender of the users was unidentifiable. This becomes even more significant when contrasted with *Figure 20* above, where among the identifiable minorities, women were the most targeted population of society. Furthermore, *Figure 19* shows that women were the targeted by attacks slightly more often than men. This phenomenon displayed itself in more ways than one. For example, in *Figure 25* below, the [author](#) posted a video glorifying violence against women, calling them “femoids”, a perjorative and dehumanizing term. This tweet also serves as a common tactic used to piggyback on positive trending hashtags to spread hateful rhetoric.



Fig. 25

At this point, it is important to recall the frequent attacks on journalist Dima Sadek throughout the project, often using insults related to her womanhood, (e.g. slut-shaming) for simply having different political views or expressing them in a way that provoked her political opponents. This is equally true for other women journalists and media professionals. These campaigns often went hand in hand with general inflammatory rhetoric, which was the predominant trend and often constituted accusations of treason, not just against Dima Sadek but against anyone who was a political opponent of the spreaders. In [Figure 26](#) below, an author uses a generic hashtag and advocates for the mass cremation of “all the trash in Lebanon.”



Fig. 26

By taking a deeper look at the political affiliation of said spreaders, the picture becomes even clearer as Hezbollah supporters constituted the majority of the attackers at 39%, followed by FPM supporters at 17%, Lebanese Forces supporters at 7%, and a few tweets by Amal Movement supporters at 2%. It is also worth noting that in 2021, several posts by ISIS militants were documented, although they were often akin to video news briefs about their “accomplishments.” In most cases, these posts were quickly taken down by Twitter. They were all posted by the same [account](#), which was also taken down.

As for the top hashtags and the monitoring timeframe, they did not play as significant a role as expected. The majority of the tweets monitored were not tied to any specific hashtag, let alone a trend. Even the monthly progression in [Figure 23](#) does not show a drastic increase or decrease following the first two months of 2021. Instead, regular fluctuations can be observed, with occasional and somewhat unpredictable spikes occurring.

Furthermore, no major anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns were monitored and the discourse towards the community was either non-existent or often subtle, using pejorative or sexist terms to insult political opponents during heated arguments. A number of reasons could explain this finding. One is that occasions when the LGBTQIA+ community is vocal are not many, and this is understandable for a

marginalised group that is commonly discriminated against. Another could be the pre-determined monthly monitoring timeframe, which could account for the gap in the report, since a campaign could happen outside the timeframe, as was the case with television monitoring. A third reason could be the social tendency to dissociate and ignore the presence of this community, given the underlying prejudices and the subculture that still views women as inferior and the LGBTQIA+ community as an abhorrent, harmful presence within society, as shown in [Figure 27](#) below. While there were no recorded attacks against disabled people, they were not part of any major conversation, which also reveals how marginalised their struggles can be.



Fig. 27: Tweet calling BDL Governor Riad Salameh a “son of a whore” as well a “son of a homosexual” as insults.

Overall, there is a pervasive theme of attacks against women, and media professionals are often the victims of problematic rhetoric, especially those who criticise Hezbollah and FPM. On the one hand, they are portrayed in a negative light according to archaic patriarchal standards in an attempt to diminish the significance of their opinions via misogynistic slurs. On the other hand, they are demonized as “agents” to damage credibility and foster an “us vs. them,” “good vs. evil” rhetoric. Similarly, the country’s woes have led to a growing sense of animosity and resentment towards migrants and refugees, who have only been the subject of discussion whenever a scapegoat was needed, and towards any opposition, which has typically been met with accusations of “conspiring against the country.” Here, a link can be seen between the largest (identifiable)<sup>2</sup> variable in *Figure 18* (Hezbollah supporters) and the largest (identifiable)<sup>3</sup> variables in *Figure 20* (women, journalists/ media and Hezbollah opposition). The same can be said about FPM supporters (the second-largest group of spreaders) when discussing migrants/refugees, LGBTQ+, and FPM opposition. Lastly, it is worth noting that when speaking of “opposition”, more often than not, those were generic tweets that did not always target an individual but a general group of people who “oppose” or criticise a specific party.

2- Not labelled as “Unclear”

3- Not labelled as “Inflammatory Rhetoric”



Fig. 28: Tweets stating that anyone opposing Hezbollah is a foreign agent (especially media)



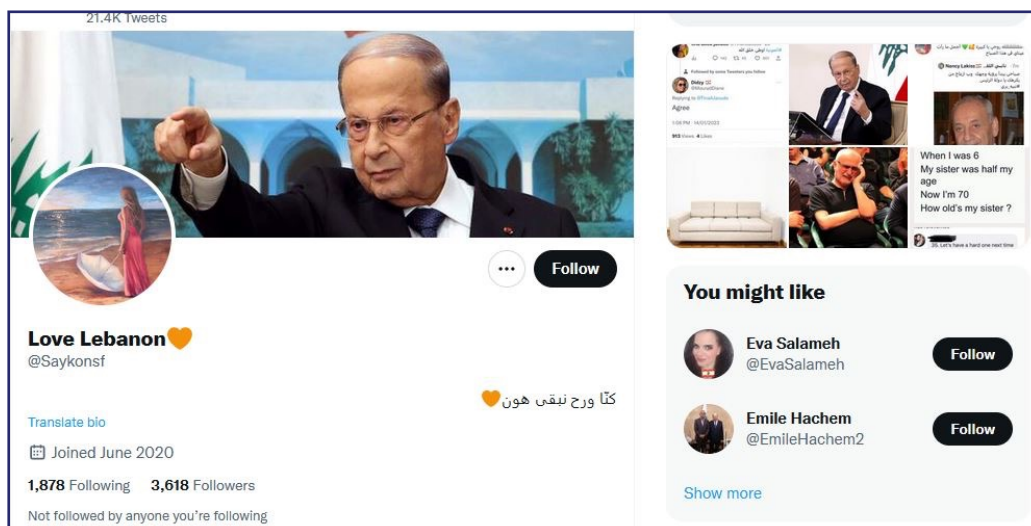


Fig. 29: Example of an FPM supporter using sexist/homophobic language against an opposition member while encouraging violence



Fig. 30: Anti-migrant rhetoric initiated and encouraged

## Summary

Women continue to be among the most targeted groups, whether it be on specific occasions or indirectly as part of a toxic patriarchal subculture. Migrants and refugees are often blamed for societal issues in times of crises. However, what is most interesting is that political discord remains the primary grounds for problematic and violent online exchanges. The media in Lebanon is heavily intertwined with politics and finds itself at the epicentre of demonization. While the study's long duration was certainly beneficial in capturing instances of problematic rhetoric, the "one week per month" limit, as well as other constraints, led to the exclusion of numerous tweets and campaigns that could have offered a more comprehensive and true-to-life dataset.

# Facebook



# Facebook

Researched and authored by Jad Hani

## Methodology

Despite the complexity and shortcomings of identifying generalisable trends across this study, we have focused on tracking accessible posts and comments that discuss or address marginalised communities in different ways on various platforms related to political parties, newspapers, news stations, news sites, and civil society organizations, as well as posts that specifically contain problematic, exclusive, or bigoted speech. While the definition of such speech may vary, this study highlights a flexible umbrella consisting of irresponsible reporting, exaggerations, generalizations, incitement, and exclusionary comments.

Manually counting all posts made by all examined pages to understand the scale of the issue relative to the total population is unfeasible. We examined 37 pages via the Facebook search engine to detect hate speech against the marginalised groups under study. Each marginalised group had its own keywords used to locate the posts under study.

The time interval in which this information was collected was strictly limited to posts and comments made during the third week of every month, specifically between the 15th and 22nd days of the month.

## Social Groups

### Migrant Domestic Workers

#### Background and Context

Over the past three years, Lebanon has experienced one of the most severe economic downturns in its history, affecting the income value of all residents and their purchasing power. Migrant domestic workers, who were initially subject to an unfair labor law known as the *Kafala* system, have been one of the most affected social groups in the country. The *Kafala* system strips the workers of most of their basic human rights, recognized by UN [statements](#), [human rights organizations](#), and [international media](#) as a form of “modern-day [slavery](#),” particularly due to the restrictive relationship that ties domestic workers to their employers.

The COVID-19 outbreak intensified the existing restriction on freedom of movement for migrant workers, who were initially not allowed to return to their home countries. Starting in 2019, most middle-class families could not afford to settle the wages of their household workers, leading to thousands of migrant workers fleeing Lebanon back to their home countries under special repatriation programs, after failed attempts to redeem their rightful wages, which in some cases escalated to legal disputes.

In such a turbulent context, many social groups, particularly migrant domestic workers, are further marginalised and forgotten, as most citizens and residents are preoccupied and distracted by the significant local economic and political transformations taking place, including but not limited to the ongoing economic decline, the fate of bank depositors, and the presidential elections. However, we should highlight the efforts to pursue collective action by local allies in Lebanon, such as the National Federation of Worker and Employee Trade Unions (FENASOL), which managed to file lawsuits and complaints against exploitative employers. Other local NGOs, such as the Anti-Racism Movement (ARM), focus on providing economic alternatives to migrant domestic workers residing in Lebanon.

## Statistics and Figures

To summarise and visualise the data gathered, a few charts and graphs are presented below. It is crucial to consider that indications stemming from this data cannot be conclusive or final due to the limited range being examined and other variables that may reinforce bias.

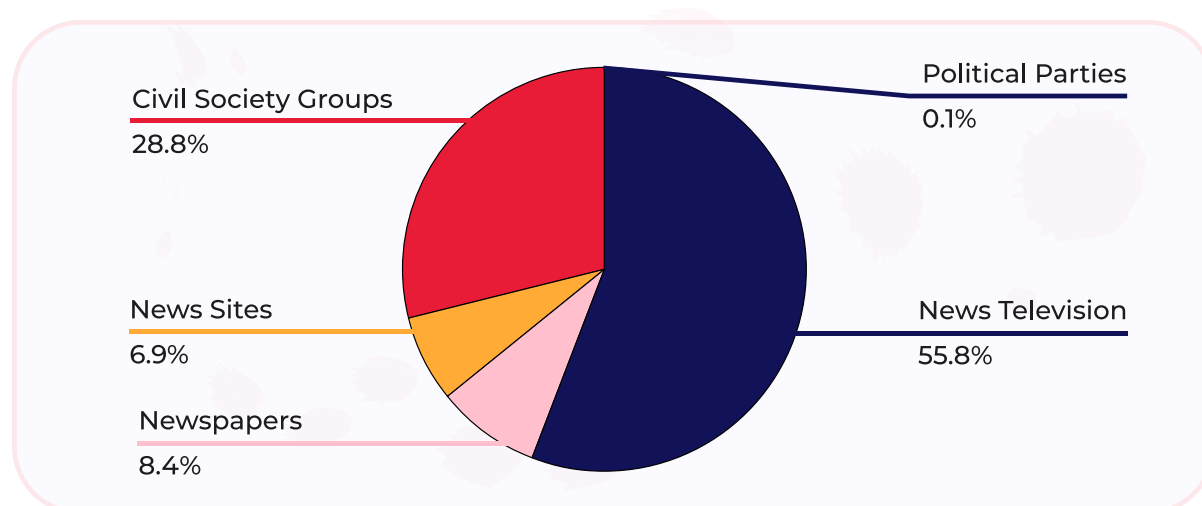


Fig. 31: Distribution of comments/posts on the topic per type of page

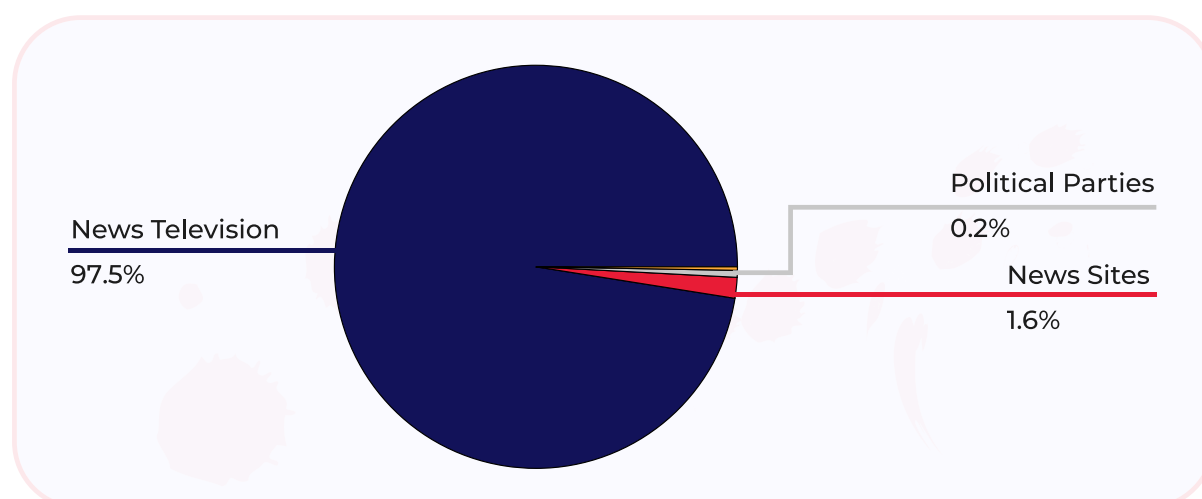


Fig. 32: Distribution of problematic comments/posts on the topic per type of page

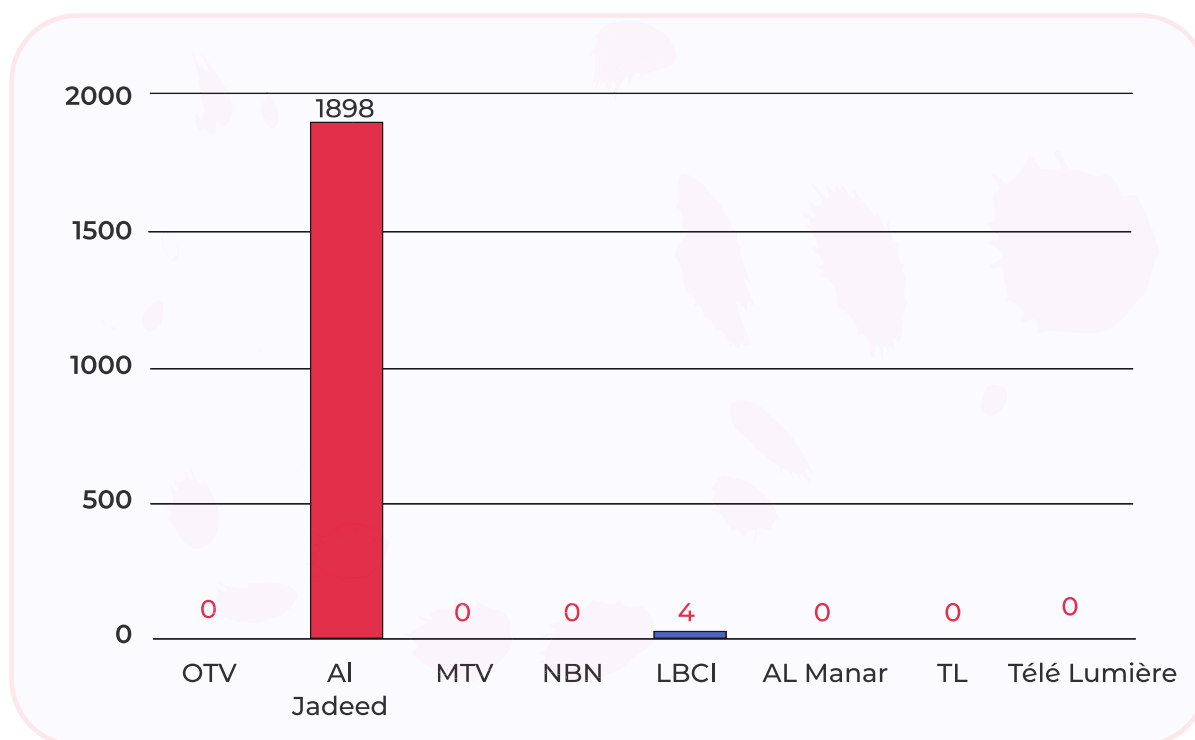


Fig. 33: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per TV Station

## Analysis and Key Indicators

When analysing the above data, there are three main conclusions that can be drawn:

**1-** It is clear that the struggle of migrant domestic workers has been erased from the national conversation as almost all local TV channels and newspapers provide very little coverage of this topic. *Figures 31, 32, and 33* show an exception from *Al Jadeed*, which is related to an incident with news anchor and host Dalia Ahmad when faced with backlash and racist comments after criticising political leaders including Hezbollah's secretary general. A major campaign was launched against her, "racializing" Ms. Ahmad, shamefully mentioning her Sudanese origins and dark skin, in an attempt to delegitimize her belonging to the country. However, this incident was an outlier in the TV data, as the research on other TV stations shows little to no coverage of the topic.

**2-** Although this topic was erased from mainstream news outlets, various news sites on Facebook broke this blackout. Nevertheless, the coverage was often problematic as it framed migrant domestic workers as the aggressors in some murder cases, neglecting the power dynamics between employers and workers. Fortunately, the majority of the interactions on these posts sympathised with the migrant domestic workers, which explains the low percentage of problematic comments in the news site's coverage.

**3-** Lastly, it is essential to point out the coverage of some civil society organizations that aimed at supporting migrant domestic workers and exposing cases of abuse. The most prominent example is “This is Lebanon,” which gave a platform to the stories of abuse faced by migrant domestic workers in their employers’ households, in addition to the NGO Anti-Racism Movement.

## Women and Gender Equality

### Background and Context

The issue of women’s rights in Lebanon has undergone many fluctuations over the past two years. Overshadowing this conversation intensified during the political turmoil that has dominated the national scene. The situation worsened dramatically following the consecutive lockdowns, which led to women being locked down with their abusers, resulting in an increase in cases of gender-based violence. Moreover, the lifting of subsidies imposed numerous challenges on women amid the failure of the Ministry of Economy and Trade to accommodate women in its policy programs. This strengthened the economic dependency of women on the male figure in their family units, thus exacerbating the power dynamics once again.

On the other hand, the concept of women’s rights and criticism of problematic speech directed at women gained some national attention after a noticeable increase in domestic violence during the pandemic. This laid the groundwork for a more serious conversation on women’s representation in the political sphere. Although sectarian parties refused to discuss any possibility of assigning gender quotas among electoral lists, women’s representation was a primary criterion in the formation of electoral lists by the majority of independent groups. The topic also resurfaced after several MPs submitted a draft law aiming to provide stronger legal grounds to combat gender-based violence, which ABAAD, a resource centre dedicated to gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa regions, prepared alongside a social media campaign under the slogan [#NoShameNoBlame](#).

Despite the above, the threat of marginalising this cause remains very high in the context of political turbulence and the uncertainty of the security situation. The economic crisis has also disproportionately impacted women in the job market, particularly in training and development. This has made it possible for organizations that focus on assisting refugee women to extend their services and support to women who have Lebanese citizenship. In this context, the electoral advancement of women in the political world and the ceremonial submission of draft laws to protect women are not sufficient in the presence of severe systemic and structural issues, particularly in terms of whether or not the community is pushing for their rights.

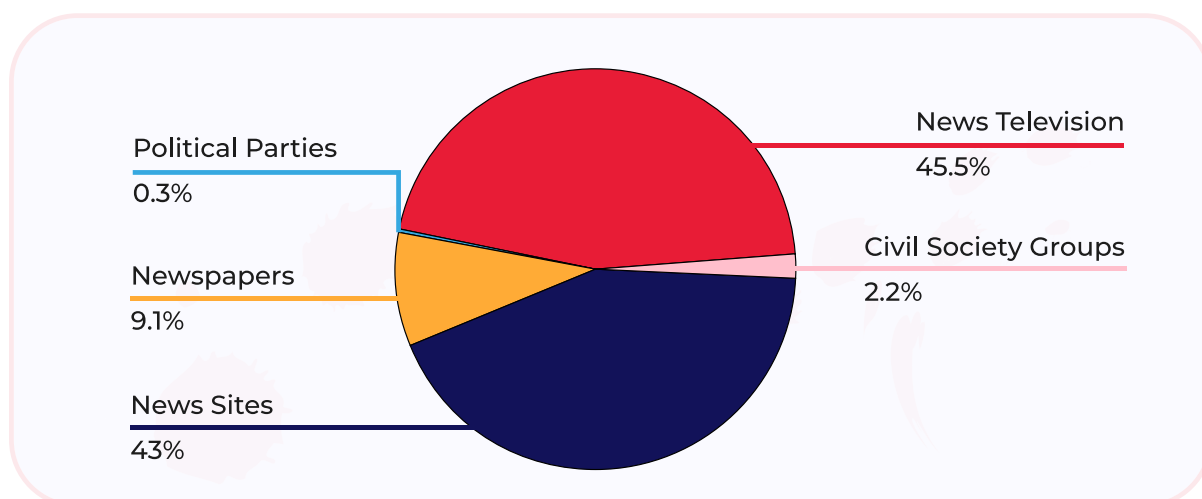


Fig. 34: Distribution of comments/posts on the topic per type of page

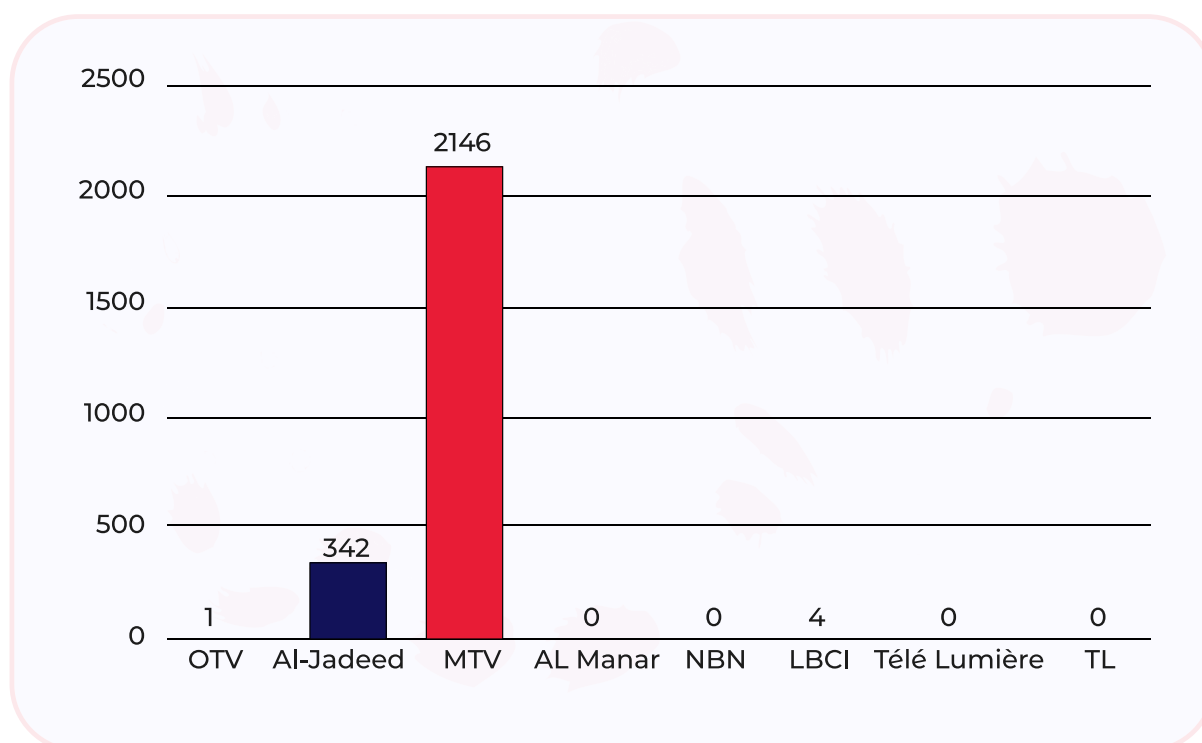


Fig. 35: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per TV station's Facebook page

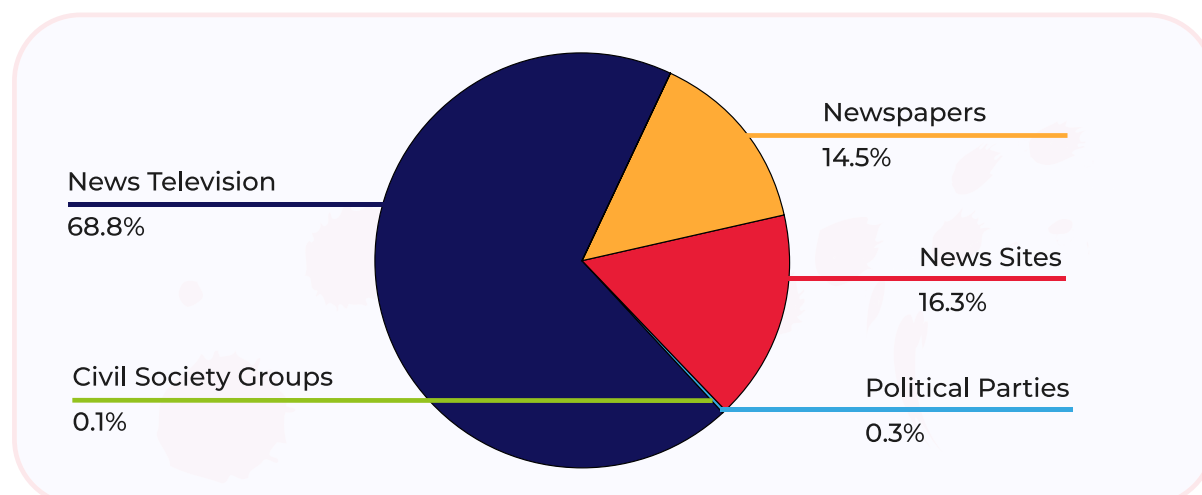


Fig. 36: Percentage of problematic comments on the topic per type of Facebook page

## **Analysis and Key Indicators**

During political contestations, men tend to use misogynistic and sexist insults directed at their rivals. Such comments proclaim ownership over women's bodies and use slurs to engage in slut-shaming. In other words, one could argue that within the country, political contestation and argumentation have yet to form a feminist culture of protection.

At more advanced stages these acts evolved and were weaponised against the rise of women in the field of public affairs and media. A good example is the case of Dima Sadek and the immense backlash she receives for her polarizing view against Hezbollah. The militant group is well known for its use of intense online bots, which explains the high number of problematic comments encountered by MTV, where Sadek works. MTV also posted several "inappropriate" posts tackling Mia Khalifa which induced problematic comments by users indulging in sexist policing, slut-shaming, and violating Khalifa's right to bodily autonomy

Nevertheless, women facing domestic abuse appear to be receiving widespread sympathy on a variety of levels. Abusive husbands are largely held accountable in the "social sense," despite the state not having much to offer institutionally and legally. It is unclear whether this sympathy stems from the perception of women being inherently vulnerable or from a feminist perspective on domestic safety. This was evident from the comments on news sites reporting domestic abuse cases. In other cases, women depicted in "revealing images" face harsh criticism for having control over their own bodies, prompting conservative commentary dictating how they should act.

## **Refugees**

### **Background and Context**

In the midst of the disastrous economic downfall, the Lebanese authorities have shown a strong belief in the myth that the influx of Syrian refugees has not only cost Lebanon billions of dollars but has also added further pressure on an already deteriorating economy. In the process, a sizable portion of the Lebanese population has been persuaded that the government's plan to return Syrian refugees back to Syria would ease the financial meltdown that Lebanon is going through.

On the other hand, water pollution and health limitations continue to plague refugee camps, both of which occur in the context of a deteriorating medical system after being initially excluded from the governmental COVID-19 vaccination plan. When it comes to security, significant threats have been targeting refugee camps as Syrians are being kicked out of their residential areas due to xenophobic fanaticism.

It appears that the Lebanese ruling class insists that those who lack basic rights should continue to pay the highest price in terms of the sacrifices they make for their well-being, stability, and financial independence. Despite no indicators Syria is safe to return to, the government is adamant in pursuing the track forced repatriation at the expense of Syrian refugees' livelihood. To take this process further Lebanese officials visited Syria and met with Hussein Makhoul, Syrian Minister of Local Administration, who claimed that Syria is ready to repatriate refugees from Lebanon.

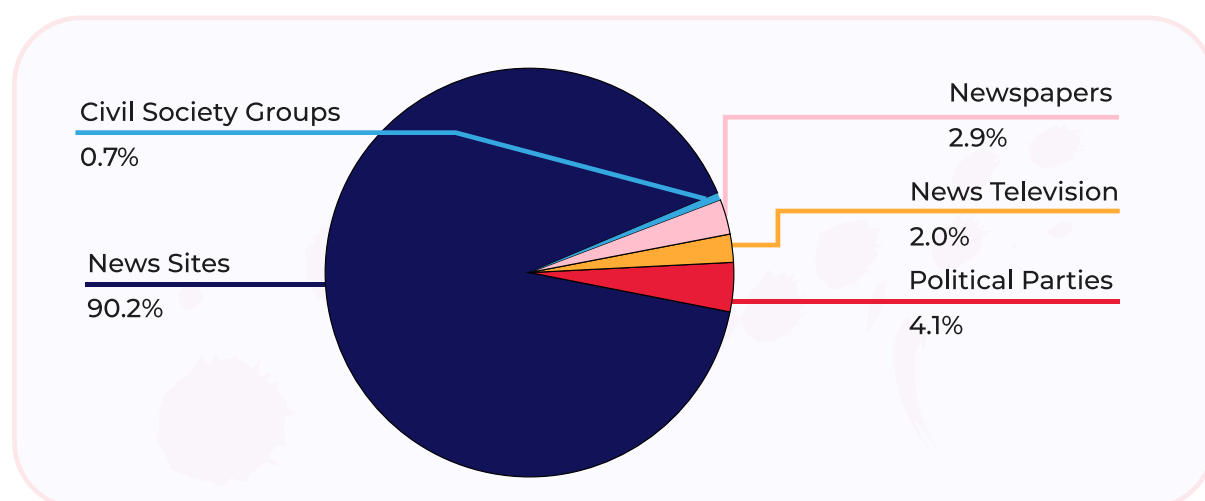


Fig. 37: Distribution of comments/posts on the topic per type of page

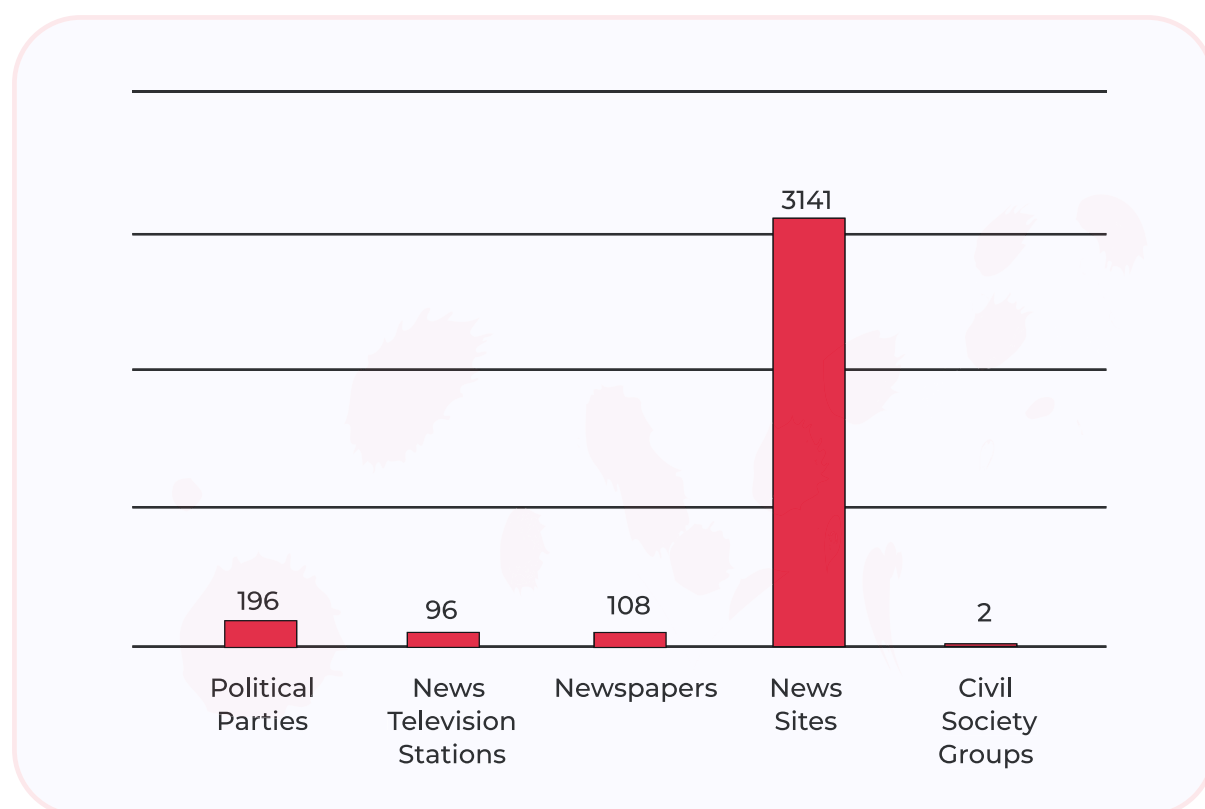


Fig. 38: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per type of page

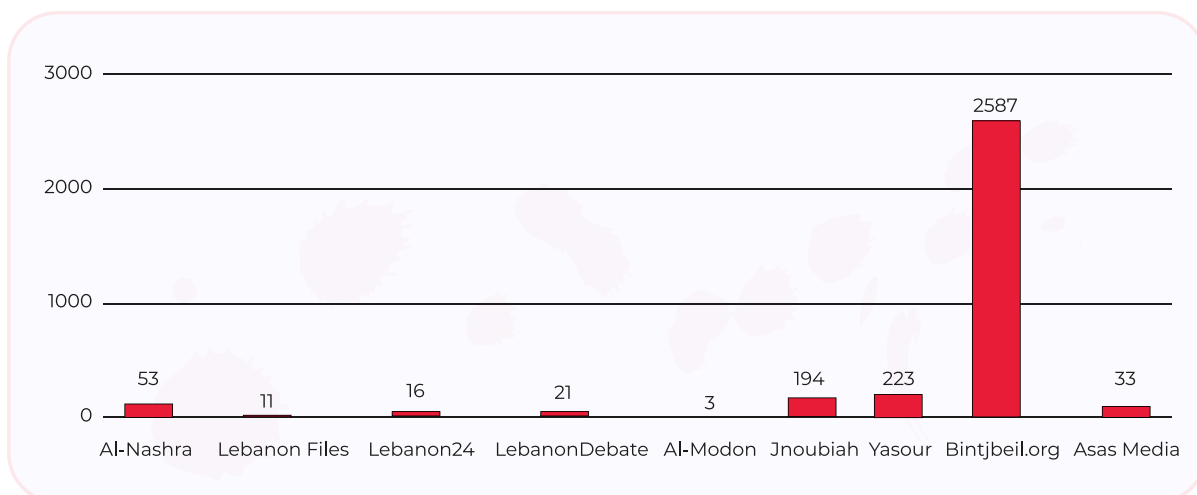


Fig. 39: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per news site

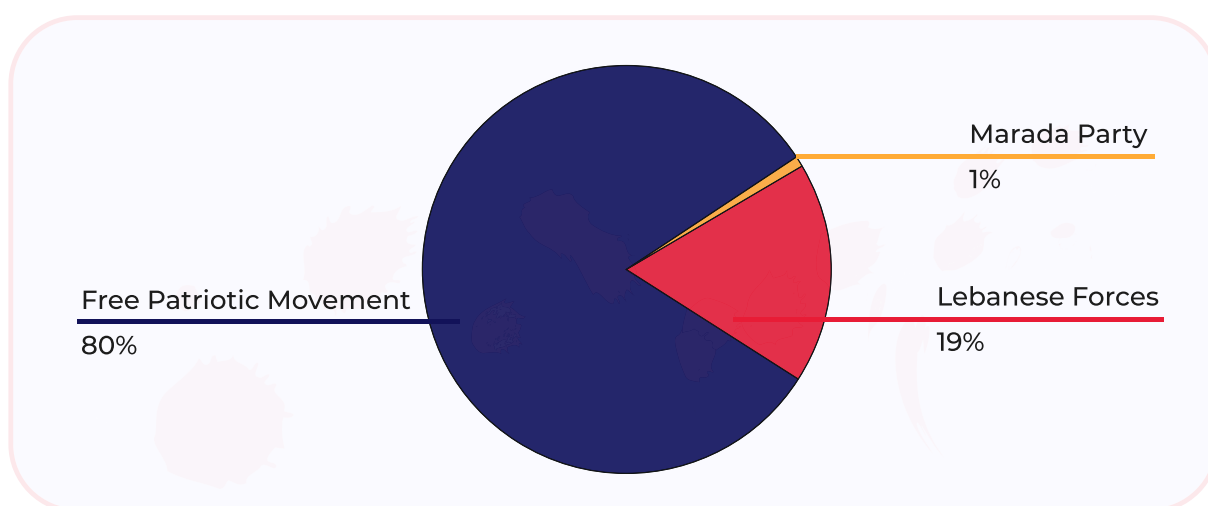


Fig. 40: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per political parties' Facebook pages

## Analysis and Key Indicators

Our data shows that refugees rank second, after the LGBTQ+ community, for the highest percentage of problematic comments. However, it is essential to note that hate campaigns against refugees fluctuate depending on the socio-economic context of the country. When SKF began monitoring hate speech in 2020, the ruling class was overwhelmed with issues that affect the general population, such as unemployment, inflation, and savings liquidation. Consequently, “countering refugees” was not a priority for the majority of Lebanon’s residents. This led to a decrease in xenophobic comments on the official Facebook pages of right-wing political parties.

However, during the election season, users commenting on the platforms of the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement criticised the performance of the two Christian-majority parties' and their stance on Syrian refugee return, as the elections forced a conversation about policy priorities. During this time, sectarian and xenophobic discourse, combined with economic grievances, was easily mobilized in pursuit of votes. Therefore, these political parties' Facebook platforms encountered the highest number of problematic posts and comments about refugees.

The final phase of the monitoring period witnessed the biggest increase in problematic comments against refugees. The data SKF gathered aligns with developments that took place during the month of August 2022, as the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, various Lebanese and Syrian government officials were negotiating the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Former president Michel Aoun in particular had been advocating for the immediate return of Syrian refugees. This is reflected on the Facebook pages of platforms, news sites, and television stations affiliated with the President's political party, the Free Patriotic Movement.

These pages have addressed the Syrian refugee crisis, and user response on the subject which ranged from criticising the Prime Minister for not raising the bar enough to accusing refugees of contributing to Lebanon's deteriorating economic situation and explicitly calling for compulsory expulsion. Other platforms, particularly news sites that do not always agree with the President, also received a large number of problematic and discriminatory comments, particularly Bentjbeil.org. This suggests that although the rhetoric began with a specific partisan priority, the general popular sentiment followed.

## LGBTQIA+

### Background and Context

Although Lebanon has made some progress on gender, sexuality, and the LGBTQ+ community's issues in recent months, the country is still absorbed by other political, social, and economic challenges. These challenges range from regional instability to the economic shocks caused by the failure of the successive cabinets to adopt a financial recovery plan, as well as external and internal crises triggered by the leaders' gridlock and diplomatic shocks. The general climate of intolerance, the relentless battle waged by religious authorities, and little societal and media-based prioritisation of LGBTQIA+ rights offers no guarantees to the community, although some developments in the judiciary outlook are promising.

The number of safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community that was formerly growing in Beirut, has recently decreased. The economic collapse left the members of the community reliant on their family members and humanitarian relief. Reports by [HRW](#), [Reuters](#), and [Al-Arab](#) emphasise the concept of restricted space is a result of

the nation's economic problems and the August 4 Beirut blast, which destroyed significant portions of regions that had safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ population, particularly around Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh. Moreover, space restrictions expanded into the digital space in the past two years, as evidenced by the banning of the dating application Grindr on certain servers and [its use by security forces](#) to crack down on community members.

In conservative areas, hostile discourse directed at members of the LGBTQIA+ community was weaponised to incite opposition to progressive, anti-establishment candidates during the 2022 parliamentary elections. This political atmosphere of fear and blackmail led candidates to tone down any inclusive attitude towards the community. The rise of extremist groups in certain areas of Beirut, known as “The Soldiers of God,” has only exacerbated this trend. As a result, only a few electoral campaigns, including those on the opposition's side, have taken the issue of decriminalizing homosexuality seriously. Furthermore, the economic crisis has made it difficult for most candidates and parties prioritised topics related to sexual rights, freedoms, and inclusion over finding solutions to the crisis.

In recent years, the public's attitude towards the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon has been in a state of flux. Following the cycle of public disinterest during the election period, an event or a decision occurs that initiates a new “episode” of public hate speech directed at the community. This debate reached its peak in June 2022, during Pride month, especially after caretaker Minister of Interior Bassam Mawlawi banned gatherings and celebrations that “promote homosexuality.” Critics of Mawlawi's decision argue that it was made to exploit the public's disinterest in the LGBTQIA+ community and put pressure on the newly elected MPs. However, Mawlawi's decision had no legal grounds, and it was later revoked in court a few weeks later.

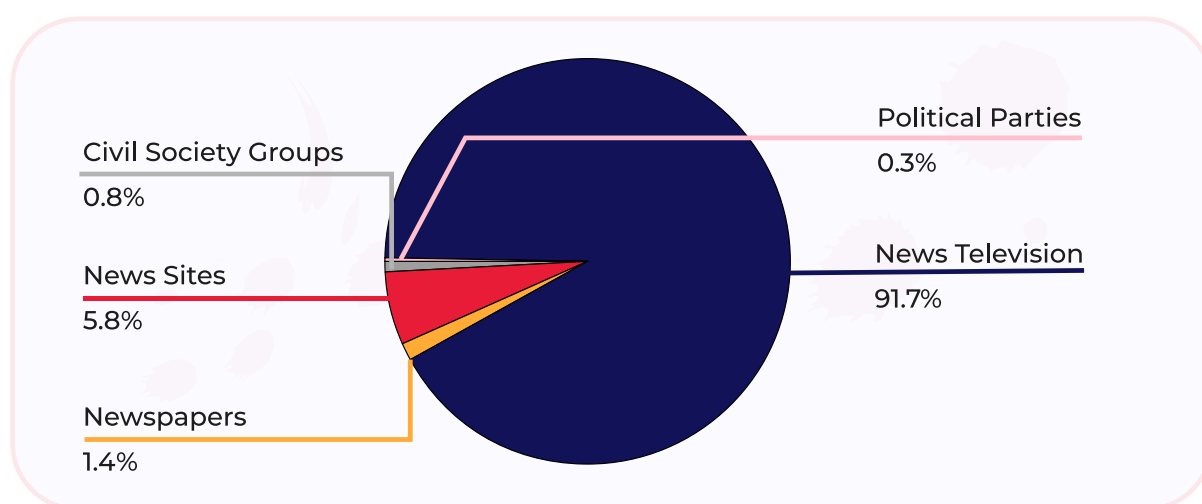


Fig. 41: Distribution of comments/posts on the topic per type of page

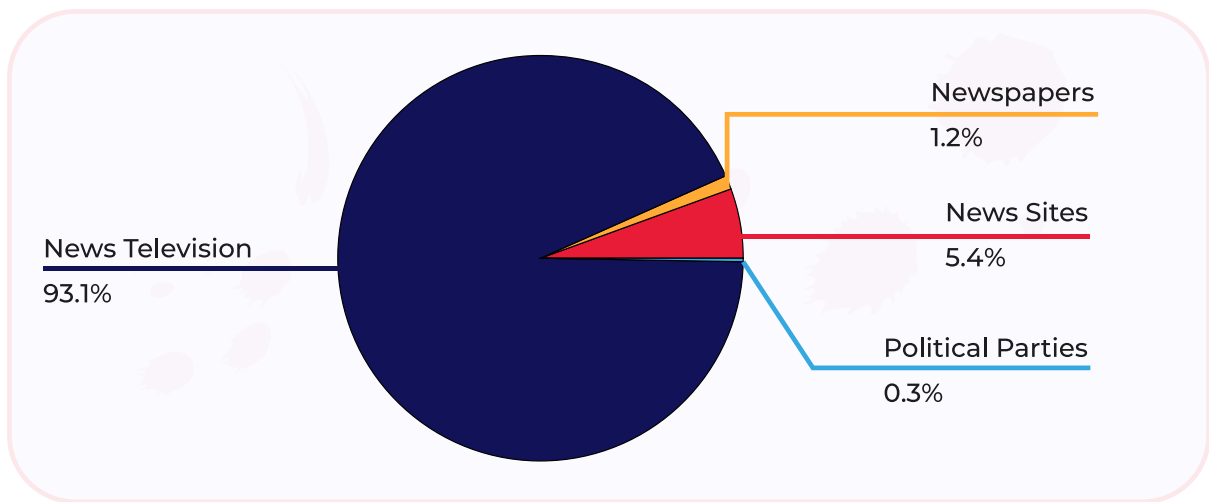


Fig. 42: Percentage of problematic comments on the topic per type of Facebook page

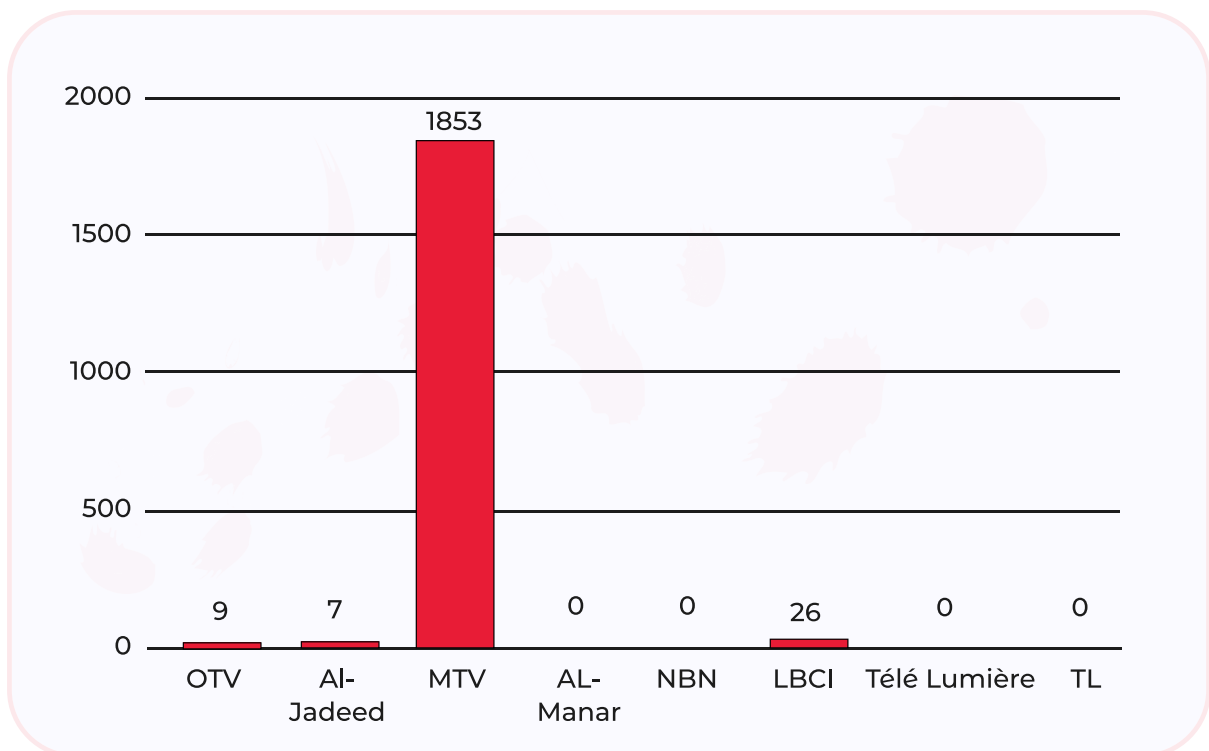


Fig. 43: Distribution of problematic comments on the topic per TV station's Facebook page

## Analysis and Key Indicators

Media coverage of the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon is significantly lower compared to other marginalised groups, while the percentage of problematic comments on the Facebook platforms is the highest, reaching 96%. This showcases two problematic indicators: the lack of visibility in the media and the hate incited through social networks.

It is important to note that traditional party supporters not only use derogatory terms against their political opponents during moments of political contestation but also target candidates who choose to have constructive conversations on topics related to the protection of the LGBTQIA+ community and the decriminalization of homosexuality. During the previous parliamentary elections, campaigns inciting violence were launched against these candidates to an extent that even prominent religious figures incited hate against them. As a result, candidates with progressive views were discouraged from having open dialogue with their voters on this issue.

This context reveals several conclusions, including that the LGBTQ+ community is still perceived as “unnatural,” “against the norm,” and generally “deserving” of negative normative platitudes. Additionally, political parties tend to weaponise this social construct for political purposes, and the data pertaining to political parties’ communication on the matter is problematic and not addressed in terms of policy advocacy.

Moreover, the lack of coverage on LGBTQIA+ topics confirms that some media outlets avoid the issue due to the backlash they receive for discussing such “inappropriate topics.” For example, MTV’s Facebook page displayed an explicit portrayal of homophobia and bigotry towards the LGBTQIA+ community, resulting in a significant increase in the number of problematic posts and comments on TV station pages, while almost no coverage was provided by other TV news stations. The problematic post was about the death of the husband of world-renowned American designer Tom Ford. Similarly, some news sites and newspapers faced backlash for discussing the streaming of the movie “Ashab Wala A’azz” (Perfect Strangers), which is Netflix’s first Arabic-speaking film featuring a gay character.

# Conclusion



## Conclusion

Hate speech reflects the fanatic politics of reactionary narratives and threatens both groups and individuals. Combating hate speech requires an active role from traditional media outlets, enhanced guidelines and policy-level commitment from social media networks. Despite the blurry standards and the biases, there is a growing narrative globally against hate speech. The louder the voices against hate speech, the safer individuals and communities are. The role of traditional and social media is crucial in shaping the narrative, flagging incidents of hate speech, and informing and influencing the larger audience's perception. It becomes even more critical when lives and livelihoods are at stake. It is unacceptable that hate speech has whitewashed political assassinations and continues to target marginalised groups. It is a source of grave concern that the media, being instruments of fact-finding and truth-seeking, are infected with hate speech. Therefore, a more aggressive approach to combatting hate speech is necessary, starting with policy discussions that intersect with the human rights system and local laws, and a technical discussion with big social media to speed up the localization of anti-hate speech policies and mechanisms.

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