



Central European
Digital Media
Observatory

CEDMO Fact-checking Summary

Q3 2023



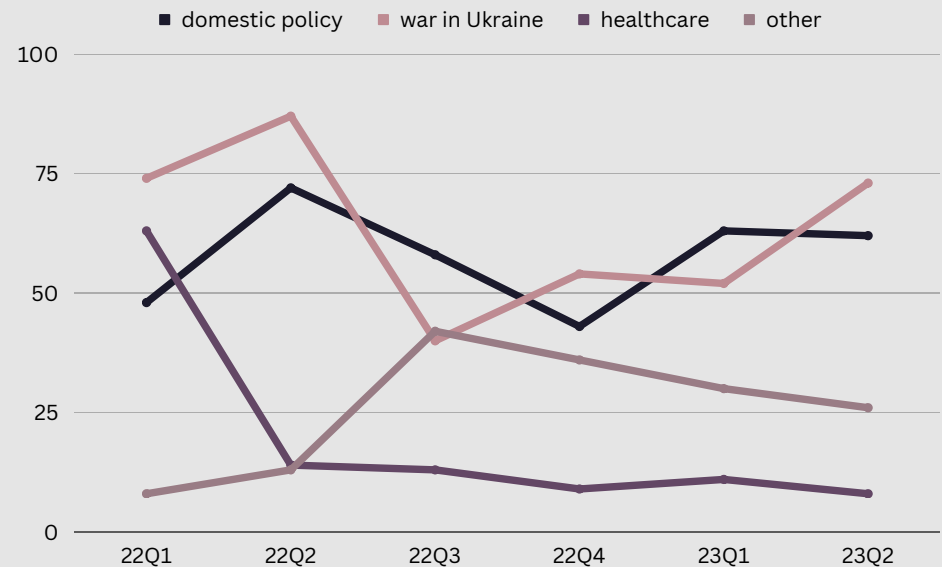
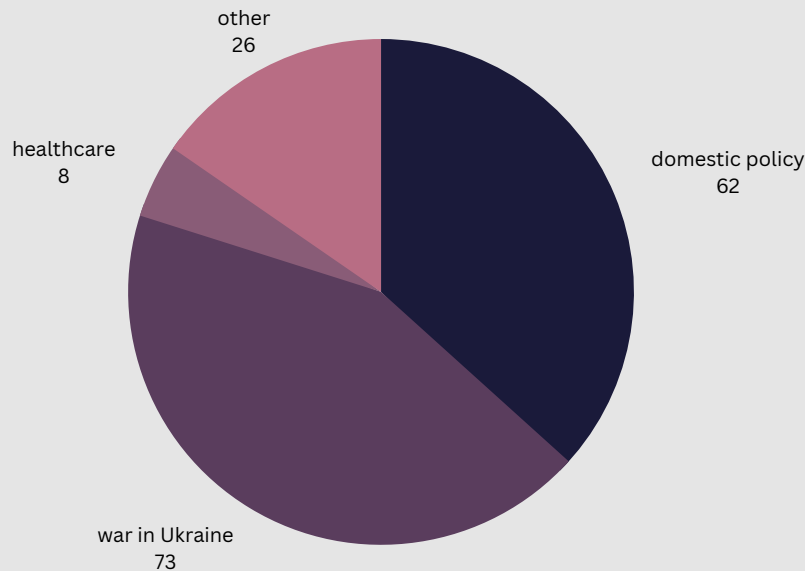
Published October 30, 2023

Trends in Disinformation Narratives

Main trends and disinformation narratives in Q3 2023

In Q3 2023, domestic policy came to the forefront as a topic, especially in relation to the election campaign in Slovakia and Poland. CEDMO fact-checking organizations continued to deal with the topic of the war in Ukraine, which has been frequent in disinformation narratives. CEDMO fact-checking organizations in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia published 190 fact-checks in total, out of which 71 concerned either the situation in Ukraine or domestic events related to Ukraine. Additionally, conspiracy narratives about harmful foods and the causes of the Hawaii wildfires were also prominent.

Fact-check topics frequency



Note: Some fact-checks concerned multiple topics.

Main Narratives in CEDMO's Scope

Parliamentary elections

During the election campaign in Slovakia, repeated statements were made, by some politicians amongst others, that the September election would be rigged by non-governmental organizations or by the ESET software company. As Infosecurity.sk described, the IT company debunked these claims since the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic uses no ESET software.

According to some posts, Slovak media and research agencies were also manipulative, as a survey conducted by an Austrian TV channel shows different results than Slovak election surveys. However, Demagog.sk stated that no Austrian TV or media company had published such a poll.

War in Ukraine

CEDMO fact-checking organizations have covered, among others, posts that misrepresented videos from Ukraine as evidence that many Ukrainian soldiers are surrendering and that combat videos are staged. For instance, one of these videos shows a May exchange of prisoners. However, Facebook posts presented it as footage of surrendering Ukrainian units. There were also unsubstantiated claims alleging Nazism in Ukraine, usually based on doctored photos. For example, fact-checkers examined reports about Ukrainian schoolchildren forming a swastika or an edited photo of Boris Johnson giving the Nazi salute, which spread into Czech and Slovak on-line communities from the propaganda website NewsFront.

Health effects of certain foods

During the summer months, posts pointing out alleged harmful substances in some foods started circulating on-line in large numbers. The main target of conspiracy theories was the Rainforest Alliance certificate, which is used on sustainably-produced food. Demagog.cz and AFP fact-checkers debunked viral posts claiming the products marked with a green frog (the Rainforest Alliance logo) contained insects, GMOs, vaccines, hormones, or other chemicals. Some conspiracy theories also mentioned alleged influence of the EU or Bill Gates. The latter also became the target of another unsubstantiated theory concerning the alleged harmfulness of products carrying the Apeel certificate. As CEDMO fact-checkers described, all these claims are unsubstantiated.

Major Narratives in Individual Countries

Czech Republic

During July and August, false statements were made about the August 1968 invasion of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia due to its upcoming anniversary. It was claimed the invasion was caused by Ukrainians, specifically the Ukrainian representatives of the USSR at the time. In the past few months, Demagog.cz has checked multiple false or misleading social media posts pointing out the alleged Ukrainian roots of Soviet politburo members, of invading soldiers, or the non-Russian roots of USSR general secretaries. This narrative of a “Ukrainian” 1968 invasion has been used approximately since the 2014 annexation of Crimea.



Poland

Due to the devastating wildfires in Hawaii, some conspiracy theories about its origins appeared. Successful statements in Polish on-line spaces included the theory that the fires were caused by hyper-modern weapons using lasers or other technology, or that they were started to build a 15-minute city on the island. However, AFP used expert statements to prove that such claims are unsubstantiated.



Slovakia

Just before the parliamentary elections, two voice recordings of the Progressive Slovakia (Progresívne Slovensko) party leader Michal Šimečka started circulating on-line. In the first, the alleged voice of Šimečka said that Progressive Slovakia plans to significantly increase the price of beer. In the second one, he was colluding with a journalist to rig the elections. According to Demagog.sk and AFP fact-checkers, these audio recordings were generated by AI.



Current Disinformation Narratives Trustworthiness in Czechia I.

Since the first wave of the research, some results haven't changed. Our respondents tend to view true narratives as trustworthy, while the disinformation narratives tend to be seen as untrustworthy.

The most trustworthy disinformation narratives included one about a military base in the city of Karlovy Vary (also the most frequently noticed one), one about a pandemic contract and one about MP Markéta Pekarová Adamová's proposal (all over 30 % trustworthy).

Question: To what extent do you consider the following information to be trustworthy?

■ Highly trustworthy ■ Somewhat trustworthy ■ Somewhat untrustworthy ■ Highly untrustworthy

An American military base is planned at the Karlovy Vary airport. This is the first consequence of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the Czech Republic and the USA, signed by Defence Minister Jana Černochová (ODS).



The Czech Republic has signed a pandemic contract with WHO, expanding WHO's authority over individual countries. This agreement makes it easier to declare a pandemic or introduce universal mandatory vaccination.



Markéta Pekarová Adamová (TOP 09), the President of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, has proposed using the funds gained from the privatization of the Budvar brewery in České Budějovice to cover healthcare costs for Ukrainian refugees.



The presidential couple faced negative public response at the Colours of Ostrava music festival. Some festival attendees screamed expletives at Eva Pavlová and one participant spat in President Pavel's face.



The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy forbade a free and democratic election in his country, which proves his regime is authoritarian.



On the instructions of Czech Finance Minister Zbyněk Stanjura (ODS), the Customs Administration has started strict checks at the Czech-Polish border—because of Czechs travelling to Poland to purchase cheap food.



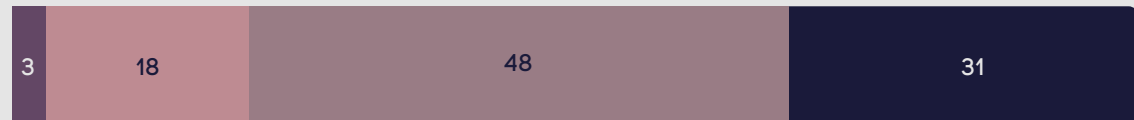
Current Disinformation Narratives Trustworthiness in Czechia II.

Since the first wave of the research, some results haven't changed. Our respondents tend to view true narratives as trustworthy, while the disinformation narratives tend to be seen as untrustworthy. The suspected trend of untrue narratives gaining popularity during the last 3 waves was not confirmed in the 6th. The average trustworthiness of disinformation narratives is currently at 25% (30% in the previous wave). Therefore, the trend of a gradually declining trust in mainstream narratives, which was considered based on May and June data, is ruled out for the moment.

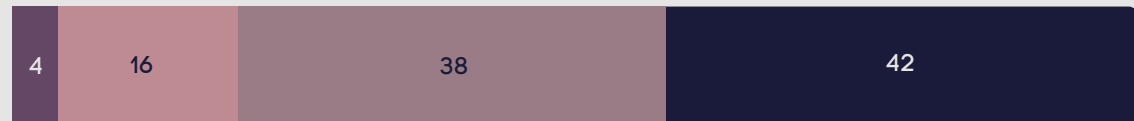
Question: To what extent do you consider the following information to be trustworthy?

■ Highly trustworthy ■ Somewhat trustworthy ■ Somewhat untrustworthy ■ Highly untrustworthy

In early July, French protesters used weapons provided for Ukraine by the West against the local police. These weapons were mostly the American anti-material rifles Accuracy International.



If Czechia passed same-sex marriage, it would encourage child trafficking and make it easier for two paedophiles to have a child in their care.



Foods using the logo of a frog (Rainforest Alliance) sold in Czech shops contain herbicide-based preservatives and the COVID-19 vaccine.



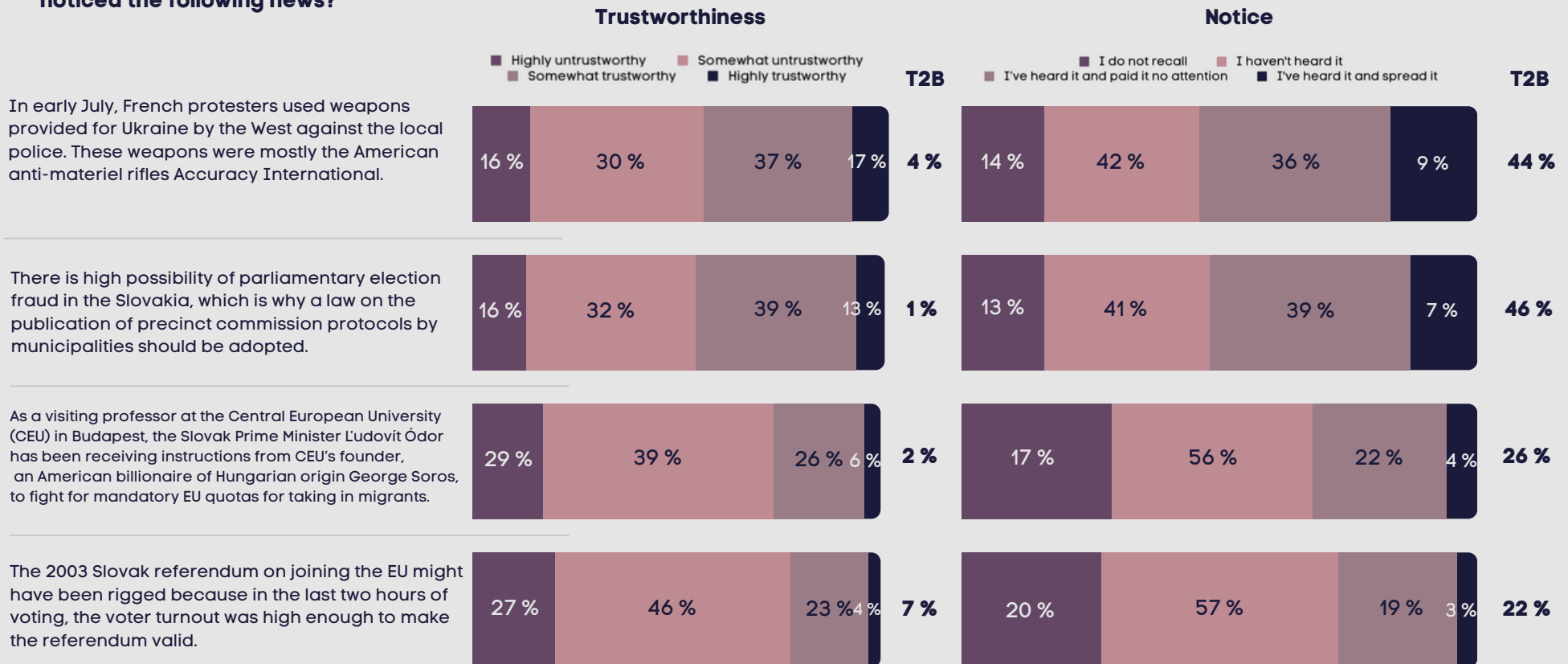
The World Economic Forum (WEF) intends to ban natural conception. By 2030, all children should be conceived in labs because the global elite is unhappy with the results of gene editing done in people who participated in the mRNA vaccine experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Current Disinformation Narratives Trustworthiness in Slovakia I.

Over half of all Slovaks believes the reports about welfare for Ukrainians and about election rigging of the Slovakian early elections are trustworthy.

To what extent do you consider the following information to be untrustworthy or, on the opposite, trustworthy? To what extent have you noticed the following news?



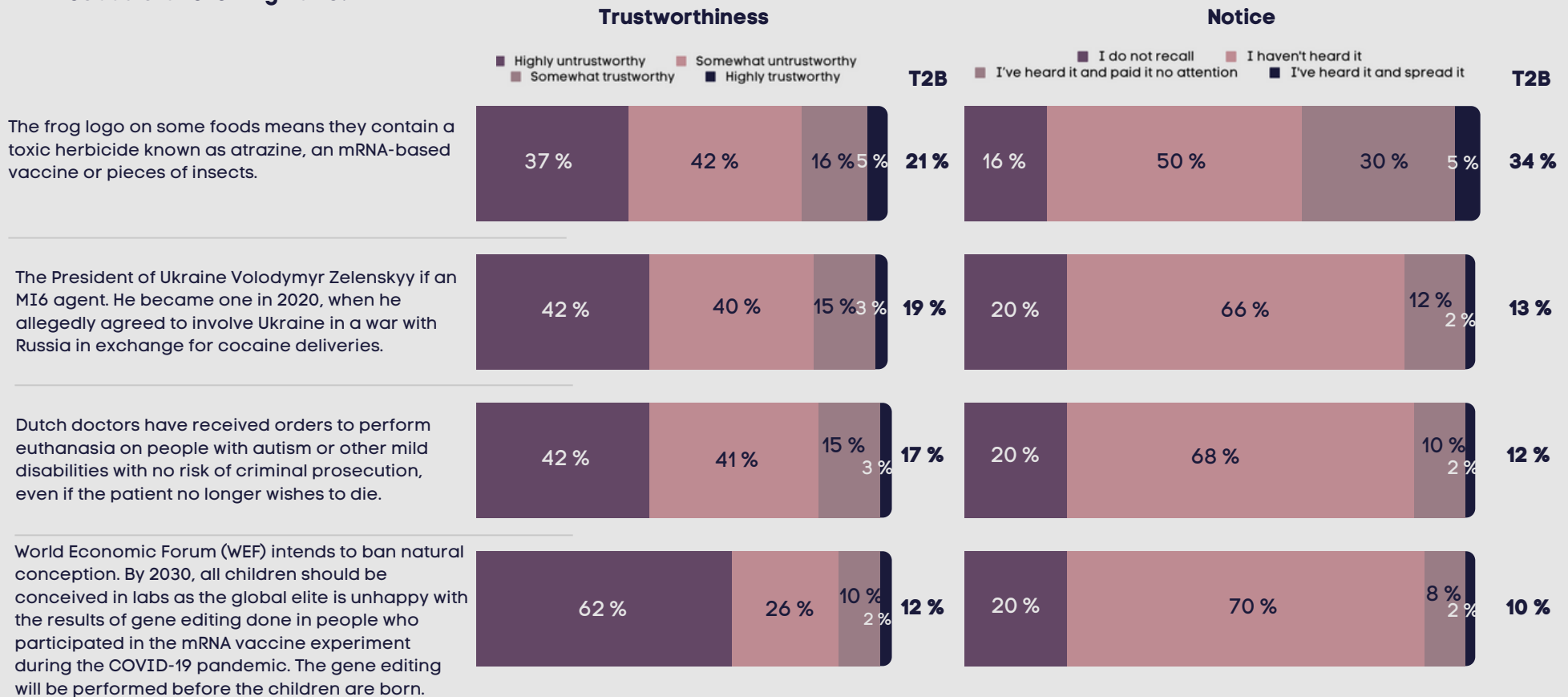
Base: n = 2370

Note: T2B = sum of the "Highly trustworthy" and "Somewhat trustworthy" or of the "I've heard and spread it" and "I've heard it and paid it no attention" responses

Current Disinformation Narratives Trustworthiness in Slovakia II.

On the other hand, Slovaks consider the reports of embryo gene editing to be the least trustworthy.

To what extent do you consider the following information to be untrustworthy or, on the opposite, trustworthy? To what extent have you noticed the following news?



Báze: n = 2370

Base: n = 2370

Note: T2B = sum of the "Highly trustworthy" and "Somewhat trustworthy" or of the "I've heard and spread it" and "I've heard it and paid it no attention" responses

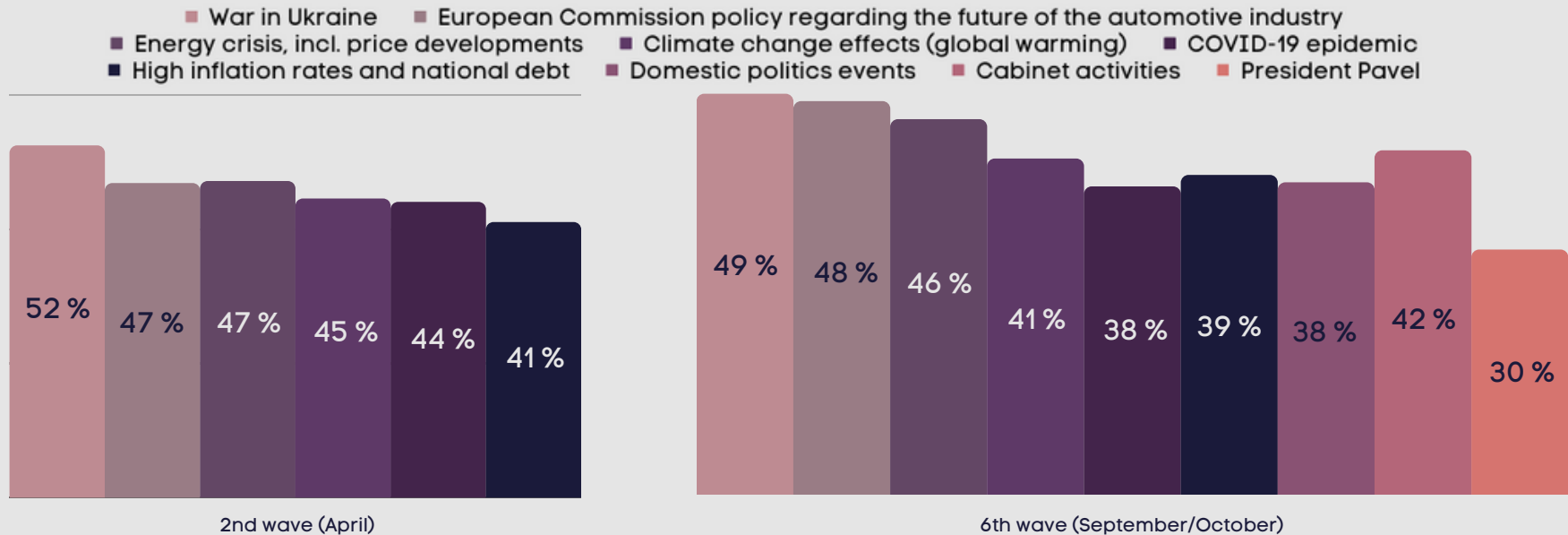
Perceived Difficulty in Identifying True News in Czechia

A change since the April measurement: It is easier to determine whether narratives about the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, the effects of climate change, the COVID epidemic, and high inflation are true. It is only harder when the narratives include the European Commission policy regarding the future of the automotive industry.

For more than half of all respondents, it is still hard to determine whether news or information about the war in Ukraine are true. It is significantly harder for women. The difficulty also grows with the respondent's age and is the hardest for retirees. Identifying whether information about the energy crisis is true was the hardest for voters of left-leaning parties, Andrej Babiš, and ANO.

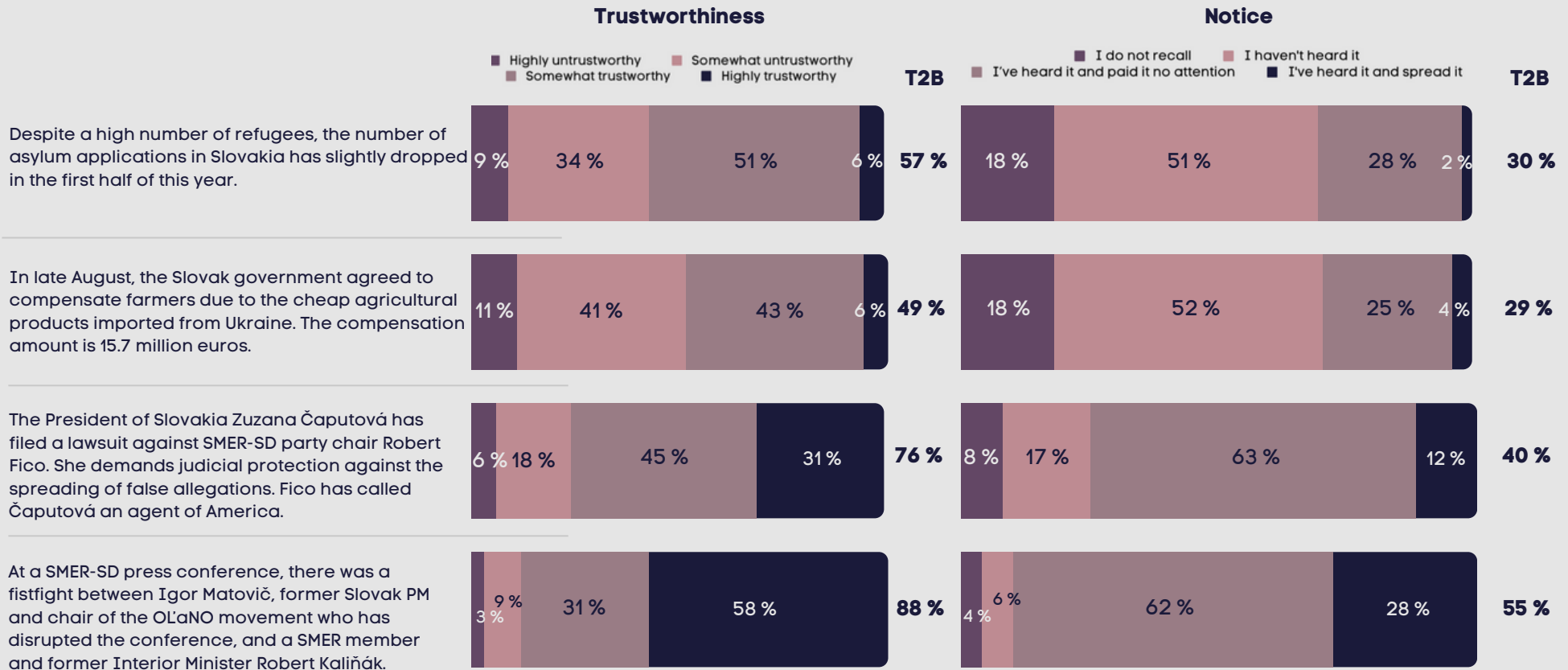
Less than half of the respondents consider it difficult to determine the veracity of climate change news. Again, the same significances as for the previous themes emerge with respect to gender, age and economic status. A larger proportion of respondents no longer finds it difficult to determine the veracity of information regarding the COVID-19 epidemic, high inflation rates, and the national debt.

Question: When you hear news/information about the following topics, how hard do you find it to determine their degree of truthfulness?



Perceived Difficulty in Identifying True News in Slovakia

To what extent do you consider the following information to be untrustworthy or, on the opposite, trustworthy? To what extent have you noticed the following news?



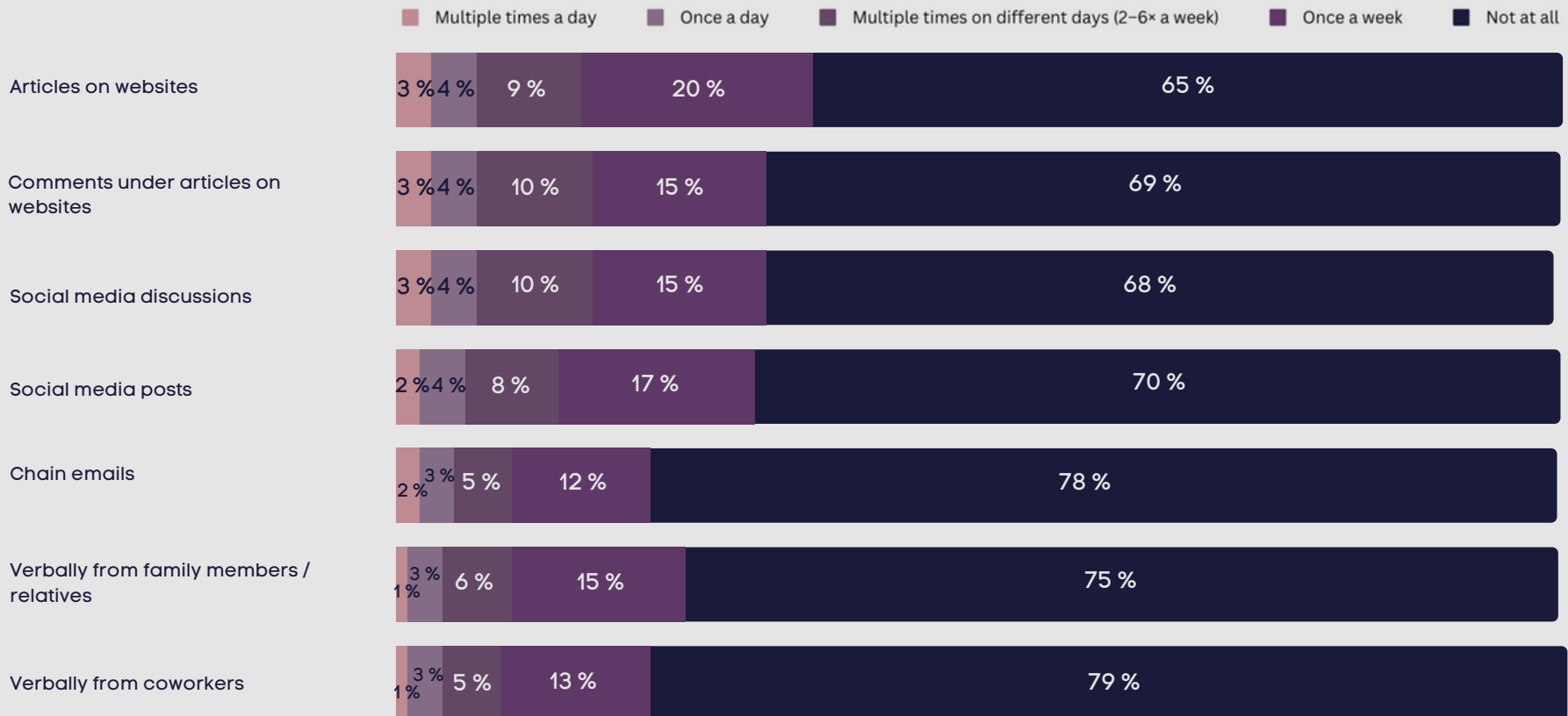
Base: n = 2370

Note: T2B = sum of the "Highly trustworthy" and "Somewhat trustworthy" or of the "I've heard and spread it" and "I've heard it and paid it no attention" responses

Disinformation sources in Czechia

In the previous month, people mostly found disinformation in articles published on various websites. Other frequent sources include social media discussions, comments under on-line articles and social media posts.

Question: In the previous months, how often have you received untrue or manipulative information (sometimes also known as “disinformation”) from the following sources?



Research Method: Czechia

Sample size	3,172 respondents aged 16 or older
Survey date	September 14 – October 2, 2023
Survey method	on-line panel survey (CAWI)
Representativity	quota sampling the survey is representative for the general population of Czechia aged 16 or older based on basic sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, region and size of town), employment status, and past voting behaviour (2021 Chamber of Deputies election, 2nd round of the 2023 presidential election)
Contracted and carried out by	survey conducted by MEDIAN, s.r.o. (SIMAR member) exclusively for Charles University

Research Method: Slovakia

Sample size	2,370 respondents aged 16 or older
Survey date	August 31 – September 8, 2023
Survey method	on-line panel survey (CAWI)
Representativity	a representative sample of the Slovak population aged 16 or older
Contracted and carried out by	survey conducted by Ipsos (member of SAVA and SIMAR) exclusively for the Charles University – CEDMO

This publication summarizes the work of selected CEDMO fact-checking organizations (AFP, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, and Infosecurity.sk) in Q3 2023.

The URLs of all fact-checks referenced in this publication can be found HERE.

Responsibility for the content of this publication lies with Demagog.cz, contact person: Petr Gongala, e-mail: petr.gongala@demagog.cz.

CEDMO contact person: Anja Grabovac, e-mail: anja.grabovac@fsv.cuni.cz.



Funded by
the European Union
NextGenerationEU



CZECH
RECOVERY
PLAN

Support for increasing the impact, innovation and sustainability of CEDMO in the Czech Republic", Project number 1.4 CEDMO 1 - Z220312000000.