

INSTITUT
MONTAIGNE



ISD | Institute
for Strategic
Dialogue

Information Manipulations Around Covid-19: France Under Attack

POLICY PAPER JULY 2020

About Institut Montaigne

Institut Montaigne is a nonprofit, independent think tank based in Paris, France. Our mission is to craft public policy proposals aimed at shaping political debates and decision making in France and Europe. We bring together leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds - government, civil society, corporations and academia - to produce balanced analyses, international benchmarking and evidence-based research. We promote a balanced vision of society, in which open and competitive markets go hand in hand with equality of opportunity and social cohesion. Our strong commitment to representative democracy and citizen participation, on the one hand, and European sovereignty and integration, on the other, form the intellectual basis for our work.

About ISD

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is an independent nonprofit organisation dedicated to safeguarding human rights and reversing the rising global tide of hate, extremism and polarisation. We draw on fifteen years of experience to combine sector-leading expertise in global extremist movements with advanced digital analysis of disinformation and weaponised hate to deliver innovative, tailor-made policy and operational responses to these threats. Our team offers policy advisory support and training to governments and cities around the world and empowers youth and community influencers through our extensive and pioneering education, technology and communications programmes.

Information Manipulations Around Covid-19: France Under Attack

*There is no desire more natural
than the desire for knowledge*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Iris Boyer

Iris is Deputy Head for Technology, Communications and Education at ISD, mainstreaming this global think tank's efforts against extremism through scaled partnerships with tech companies, policymakers and civil society. She also leads ISD's regional development in France and specialises on Digital Policy.

She co-authored a number of reports on Online Hate and Digital Citizenship Education. Iris previously managed counter speech and social good programs for Facebook's EMEA policy team, and led development on the global YouTube campaign 'Creators for Change'. Prior to that, she held analyst roles at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and French Ministry of Finance. She holds a French 5-year diploma in social sciences and humanities from Sciences Po, as well as an international master in public affairs from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and the London Metropolitan University.

Théophile Lenoir

Théophile develops Institut Montaigne's research program on digital issues. The program looks at the challenges associated with the collection, processing and transfer of data in European societies, ranging from social cohesion to information security. His own work focuses on communication technologies and the transformations of the public sphere in France, and seeks to explore new models of governance for digital technologies.

Before joining Institut Montaigne, Théophile worked for start-ups at the intersection of media and technology (a media-monitoring tool and a content-provider platform) in London and Los Angeles. Théophile graduated from the London School of Economics and from the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, where he followed the double degree "Global Media and Communications".

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Methodology | 9 |
| How we identified messages | 9 |
| How we identified discussion groups in which these messages circulate | 9 |
| A word of caution | 10 |
| I. Covid-19: a convenient pretext for authoritarians and anti-Europeans | 11 |
| Pro-authoritarian narratives very successful in nationalist and Yellow Vest communities | 11 |
| Pro-Russia narratives more present than pro-China narratives | 12 |
| Nationalist, anti-capitalist and anti-Islam communities most sensitive to anti-European narratives | 12 |
| II. 5G and French business and politics conspiracy theories are the most present | 14 |
| 5G messages most present in anti-technology and naturalist communities, but also in Yellow Vest and anti-capitalist ones | 14 |
| Anti-Islam, nationalist and Yellow Vest communities most interested in disinformation about the French government; anti-capitalists in theories against pharmaceuticals companies | 15 |
| Other conspiracy theories and disinformation less present | 16 |
| Overall, disinformation deleted on social networks but remains highly visible in the media | 17 |
| III. Official reactions to the “infodemic” | 18 |
| Public authorities’ reaction: Government, European Union and International organizations | 18 |
| Platforms | 19 |
| Conclusion | 21 |
| Appendix 1 : the 37 messages observed in this study | 24 |
| Appendix 2 : the messages in French thematic communities | 28 |
| Table 1 : Pro-authoritarian and anti-European narratives in French thematic communities | 28 |
| Table 2 : Disinformation and conspiracy theories in French thematic communities | 29 |
| Table 3 : A comparison of the circulation of messages in French communities, ratios | 30 |

INTRODUCTION

On 10th June, the European Commission published its Communication on disinformation related to the Covid-19 crisis, urging platforms to do more to combat fake content online. Indeed, as Covid-19 was spreading around the world, it was accompanied by a multiplicity of rumors, disinformation and misinformation pieces as well as conspiracy theories that fed public debates everywhere.

France was not immune to this phenomenon: here as well, the Covid-19 pandemic entered, in different shapes and forms, French discussion groups and communities. Institut Montaigne and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue decided to look at the circulation of different narratives and pieces of disinformation in French discussion groups during the pandemic, and analyze the porosity between discussion topics in France: Does a disinformation piece on migrants travel to anti-technology and naturalist discussions? Does a message promoting China’s response to the crisis travel to discussions linked to the Yellow Vest movement - the French protest movement that started in October 2018? With the help of Linkfluence, a French media monitoring and digital analysis startup, 37 messages related to Covid-19 were selected, and their circulation within six thematic communities from 1st December 2019 to 30th April 2020 was then analyzed.

Our mapping shows that the sharing of information and disinformation is always political: information, whether true or false, only circulates in communities that are interested in it. Consequently, actors can take advantage of events such as the Covid-19 crisis to draft messages that meet these interests and serve political goals. In this sense, this paper highlights the fragilities of French public spaces online: groups that are interested in messages that defend authoritarian regimes and weaken Europe, and that share disinformation on the French government’s response are possible entry points for foreign and domestic actors wishing to influence French politics.

Despite the actions being taken by social media platforms, governments and supra-national organizations, disinformation remains visible online. This has led the European Commission to ask platforms to take significant action against disinformation, leaving foreign influence messages based on worldviews (that are neither false nor illegal) online. As the recent decision by the French Constitutional Council, the highest French legal authority, to revoke France’s hate speech law’s central section¹ shows there is a

¹ The hate speech law’s 1st article forced platforms to delete “manifestly illegal” hate speech signalled by users within 24 hours of notice. The law also asked to remove terrorist content and child pornography within one hour following an administrative order from police.

limit to what platforms can do to moderate and remove content. Thus, the West needs to look beyond the messages themselves to draft responses that go further than content moderation. This study contributes to increasing public actors' understanding of these phenomena, to help them learn how to live in a world of online communications and influence.

METHODOLOGY

How we identified messages

Our selection of messages is based on existing studies led by fact-checking organizations (such as Le Monde, Agence France Presse, the World Health Organization or the EUvsDisinfo platform from the European External Action Service) as well as research in the field of information manipulation (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, EUvsDisinfo, First Draft). In total, 37 messages were selected and grouped by theme. For each message, keywords were identified and then searched for in online discussions on Twitter and public Facebook pages. The list of messages is non-exhaustive; it seeks to include the main narratives surrounding the Covid-19 crisis.

How we identified discussion groups in which these messages circulate

With the help of Linkfluence, a French media monitoring and digital analysis startup, 30,000 online posts and articles were found mentioning these 37 messages². Linkfluence then looked at the actors who shared these pieces of information. Six groups of influencers were created, based on both explicit information (a declarative statement in the description of a Twitter account) and implicit information (online practices, particularly sharing certain types of sources). In other words, Linkfluence would start by identifying influencers identifying themselves as “nationalists” or “anti-technology” before pooling together highly visible users sharing posts from these influencers, as well as articles from sources often quoted by them. In this way, Linkfluence created a list of influencers and highly visible accounts that serve as a sample for the communities below.

The communities below are not exhaustive and do not give a full picture of the French public debates. They were selected because they were the most visible communities relaying information on the messages identified.

The 6 discussion communities are the ones that present themselves as:

- Nationalists: using keywords such as “patriot”, “nationalist”, “Rassemblement National³”;

² The list of 37 messages can be found in Appendix 1.

³ *Rassemblement National* is a French far-right party led by Marine Le Pen.

- ▶ Anti-Islam: using keywords such as “anti-Islam”, racial slurs, or insulting Islam and Muslims;
- ▶ The Yellow Vests movement: using keywords such as “Yellow Vests⁴” or including a profile picture referring to the movement;
- ▶ Anti-technology: using keywords such as “anti-technology”, “anti-5G”, “Linky meters⁵”;
- ▶ Naturalists: using keywords such as “anti-vaccine”, “homeopathie”, “natural”, sharing information against processed food products and pharmaceutical companies;
- ▶ Anti-capitalists: using keywords such as “alter-globalization” (“altermondialisme”), “far left”, “France Insoumise⁶”, “French Communist Party”.

A word of caution

The figures below indicate a community’s interest, not belief, in the debate surrounding a message: this study looks at the presence of messages in French online communities; when following disinformation content, articles that debunk them are often present in the corpus.

COVID-19: A CONVENIENT PRETEXT FOR AUTHORITARIANS AND ANTI-EUROPEANS

Pro-authoritarian narratives are very successful in nationalist and Yellow Vest communities

We find occurrences of messages defending or promoting China, Russia or other authoritarian regimes, in general in a number of thematic communities that take part in French public debates over Covid-19. These messages are representative of worldviews and are not necessarily disinformation content. For example, they include the argument that China saved Europe by exporting masks, that Russia played a key role in slowing the spread of the virus in Italy, or that only authoritarian states will be able to protect their populations from the coronavirus and future pandemics.

“The Russian army will start to send medical aid on Sunday in Italy to help the country fight the coronavirus pandemic thanks to a demand from President Vladimir Poutine 🍌🍌🍌🍌”⁷

Post from a public Facebook page with 870,000 followers

These messages have had a **strong echo** in communities that often share information from influencers and sources that present themselves as **nationalists, anti-Islam** or belonging to the **Yellow Vests** movement. This is particularly true of the messages that praise Russia, which represent 15%, 12% and 10% of messages in each community respectively. These narratives are **less present, but noticeable**, in communities that tend to present themselves as **naturalists** (which include actors that are against vaccinations): the messages that praise Russia represent 7% of the messages in this group; the ones that promote the Chinese system represent 2% of all messages in this group.

If this analysis raises the question of a foreign presence in these discussions, our analysis should not be interpreted as proof of such a presence in French debates. Rather, we argue that, because these communities have an interest in authoritarian arguments, **they are a possible entry point for foreign actors who wish to heighten tensions in France.**

⁷ Original tweet in French: “L’armée russe va commencer dimanche à envoyer de l’aide médicale en Italie pour aider le pays à combattre l’épidémie de coronavirus à la demande du président Vladimir Poutine 🍌🍌🍌🍌”

⁴ The Yellow Vests is a French protest movement that started in October 2018. Read Institut Montaigne’s article on the movement here: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/yellow-vest-protesters-tip-french-social-crisis>

⁵ The Linky meters, which measure and share information on electrical consumption in French households, were the source of intense debates online.

⁶ France insoumise is a French far-left party led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Pro-Russia narratives are more present than pro-China narratives

Overall, pro-Russia narratives are more present than pro-China narratives. This can partly be explained by Russia's more aggressive interventions in political discussions abroad, as argued by French researchers Paul Charon and Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer⁸. However, it should be noted that the gap seems to be decreasing between the two countries. In its 10th June communication, the European Commission officially named China as an actor spreading falsehoods online, based on the work conducted by the European External Action Service (EEAS). Similarly, the Alliance for Securing Democracy has reported on the creation of disinformation content by Chinese actors in its *Hamilton Weekly Report: June 6-12, 2020*.

Overall, to date, it seems that Chinese actors spread disinformation mostly in English. Foreign languages are often a barrier to international disinformation campaigns. During the 2017 French presidential election, one of the reasons for the relative failure of campaigns emerging from the American alt-right and Russia was that neither were competent enough in French to successfully enter French communities.

Overall, **anti-capitalist** and **anti-Islam** communities seem to be more interested in anti-European than in pro-authoritarian messages. The anti-capitalist community, which is very interested in anti-European messages, relays significantly less information regarding the way China or Russia handled the crisis compared to the other groups.

It is worth noting that the anti-technology community is the most immune to both anti-European and pro-authoritarian narratives. The naturalist community remains sensitive to messages defending or promoting Russia, but not the rest.

Nationalist, anti-capitalist and anti-Islam communities are the most sensitive to anti-European narratives

The communities that share information on Russia and China do not systematically share anti-European messages. The communities that are the **most sensitive** to critical narratives towards Europe are communities gathered around **nationalist**, **anti-Islam** and **anti-capitalist** interests. These messages also caught attention, but to a lesser extent, in the Yellow Vests community.

"#Italy must be getting the #EU exit paperwork ready as soon as the #coronavirus pandemic ends. Europe is a complete fiasco, a bureaucratic dictatorship as much useless as it is costly. No one helped them, Chinese were more generous! #Italexit #Frexit"⁹

Post from a Twitter user with 24,000 followers

⁸ <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/russia-as-a-hurricane-china-as-climate-change-different-ways-of-information-warfare/>

⁹ Original tweet in French: "L' #Italie doit certainement préparer les papiers de sortie de l' #UE dès la fin de l' épidémie de #Coronavirus. L'Europe est un fiasco intégral, une dictature bureaucratique aussi inutile que ruineuse. Personne ne les a aidés, les Chinois ont été plus généreux ! #Italexit #Frexit"

5G AND FRENCH BUSINESS AND POLITICS CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE THE MOST PRESENT

5G messages are the most present in anti-technology and naturalist communities, but also in the Yellow Vests and anti-capitalist ones

Amongst the conspiracy theories concerning the virus, the one claiming that 5G favors the spread of Covid-19 is the most represented in our discussion communities. The 5G topic received a lot of attention worldwide. In France, the topic was discussed after attacks occurred on 5G masts in the United Kingdom, as reported by The Guardian at the beginning of April. Therefore, a significant part of the French messages caught by Linkfluence relay information on the UK situation. Specific to France, the 17th April CNews interview of French virologist Luc Montagnier, who stated that 5G frequencies may have contributed to the spread of the virus, has fueled debates.

Overall, several theories and types of content related to 5G circulated from 1st December 2019 to 30th April 2020:

- the idea that the 60 GHz frequency used by 5G technologies modifies oxygen and further weakens people with diseases;
- the idea, based on Ukrainian and Russian studies, that 5G weakens human immune systems;
- world maps showing the correlation between countries that have started 5G experiments and countries that were hit by coronavirus;
- the idea that the government is taking advantage of the Covid-19 crisis to move faster on 5G development.

"Covid-19 is best described by the disease called : Covid-5G Hypertoxicity Syndrome"¹⁰

Post from a public Facebook page with 6,000 followers

¹⁰ Original tweet in French: "COVID-19 se décrit mieux par le nouveau nom de maladie suivant: Syndrome d'hypertoxicité COVID-5G"

The communities that are the most interested in the messages around 5G identify themselves as being **anti-technology** (66% of all messages) or **naturalist** (42%). The theory has also sparked interest in other groups, such as the **Yellow Vests** (20%) and **anti-capitalist** (16%) communities.

"CORONAVIRUS + VACCINES + CHEMTRAILS + 5G = DEPOPULATION"¹¹

Post from a public Facebook page with 11,000 followers

Anti-Islam, nationalist and Yellow Vest communities are most interested in disinformation about the French government; anti-capitalists in theories against pharmaceuticals companies

The message ranked in second place in terms of quantity of articles and posts generated in our corpus concerns the former Health Minister Agnès Buzyn and her actions to delegitimize Professor Didier Raoult, who promotes the use of Hydroxychloroquine as a cure to Covid-19 in France. Two main narratives emerged:

- the idea that Agnès Buzyn and her husband Yves Lévy, former chair of the national health research center Inserm, had interests in preventing Hydroxychloroquine from reaching the market;
- the idea that Agnès Buzyn forbade the sale of Hydroxychloroquine.

"In 2018 Didier Raoult highlighted the existence of an old dispute with the Health Minister's husband, CEO of Inserm (public research organization in France), Yves Lévy, concerning the IHU model . Macron-ian conflicts of interest at the heart of the #chloroquinegate?"¹²

Post from a Twitter account with 56,000 followers

These messages were mostly visible in the community that identifies as **anti-Islam** (it represents 37% of all messages posted by the community), and the ones that identify as nationalist (25%) or belonging to the **Yellow Vests** movement (24%). Comparatively, neither the anti-technology community nor the naturalist community seems interested in the debate, which represent 2% and 9% of all messages in each discussion group respectively.

¹¹ Original tweet in French: "LE CORONAVIRUS + LES VACCINATIONS + LES CHEMTRAILS + LA 5G = LA DÉPOPULATION"

¹² Original tweet in French: "En 2018 Didier Raoult fait état d'un conflit ancien avec le mari de la ministre, par ailleurs PDG de l'Inserm, Yves Lévy, sur le modèle des IHU. Les conflits d'intérêt de la macronie au cœur du #chloroquinegate?"

The community that identifies as **anti-capitalist** stands in the middle, with 15% of all messages related to the disinformation concerning Agnès Buzyn. However, they are the most interested in messages that concern the government in general, including disinformation about staff working in French nursing homes leaving, which together represent 13% of their messages. They are also the community that have shared messages arguing that pharmaceutical companies are taking advantage of the crisis to sell more vaccines.

Other conspiracy theories and disinformation are less present

Amongst the remaining disinformation messages, the most prevalent in the discussion communities are the ones concerning migrants (the idea that migrants are spreading the virus), French Muslim and African populations (the idea that they have special quarantine rules), and, in general, foreigners (the idea that they regularly attack police officers). Such **xenophobic messages** were mostly found, although in smaller proportions than previous messages, in the communities presenting themselves as being **nationalist, anti-Islam** or belonging to the **Yellow Vests** movement.

*"Incredible: some muslims health workers refuse to wash hands with alcoholic-based solutions ! They are crazy 🤪 #COVID-19 #lockdownday7"¹³
Post from a Twitter account with 6,500 followers*

The messages presenting **cures to Covid-19**, including **dangerous information**, such as the suggestion that bleach or cocaine are remedies, and **fake cures**, such as the use of heat, zinc or blue cheese as protection from the virus, were mostly present, although in very small proportions, in the **naturalist community**. This is similar to what was observed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) in the 27th March briefing on disinformation related to the Covid-19.

The messages accusing the United States of having created the virus, involving Bill Gates, or presenting Covid-19 as a conspiracy against Donald Trump, were mostly absent from French online discussions on Twitter and Facebook. This sits in stark contrast to online discussions in other contexts. For example, in the US, conspiracy theories blaming Bill Gates and other "global elites" for the spread of

coronavirus are prevalent in fringe discussions monitored by ISD. While these anti-elite narratives are longstanding, the extent to which coronavirus has dominated these discussions marks a notable shift.

Some pieces of disinformation are not present on French social networks but remain highly visible in the French media

There are several hypotheses to explain why the conspiracy theory accusing Bill Gates of having created the virus are mostly absent from French social media. The first is that conspiracy theories are very often adapted to a local context. This would help explain why messages specific to France, such as the one concerning the Lévy/Buzyn couple, were more successful. The second is that social media companies have taken action to remove disinformation content, making it difficult to evaluate the reach of pieces of disinformation when they appear. Unfortunately, civil society and governments still have too little information regarding which content is removed and why, and to date this cannot be verified.

Other disinformation, such as fake cures or dangerous information regarding the virus (including the idea that bleach is a remedy) were also largely absent from Twitter and Facebook. It could be that this disinformation spread mostly on messaging services such as WhatsApp or Telegram. This may be specific to the French context, as ISD has identified significant sharing of fake cures in English on social media, notably the harmful assertion that colloidal silver can help "resolve" coronavirus.

Overall, the absence of such messages on social media raises the difficult question of the media's role in covering disinformation. By warning against the circulation of disinformation narratives, media organizations can play a significant role in making them more visible. More than ever, disinformation content has been amplified in France. French television media, with audiences reaching 6 million viewers, have been covering the spread of disinformation, such as the concerning or outright dangerous fake cures to Covid-19. Similarly, our study shows that the only occurrences of messages such those spread by the Chinese Ambassador in French, arguing that French staff in nursing homes left, or that Institut Pasteur created the virus, came mostly from fact checkers and dedicated articles in traditional media that circulated on social media.

¹³ Original tweet in French: "Incroyable : refus de certains soignants musulmans de se laver les mains avec des solutions à base d'alcool ! Ils sont fous 🤪 #COVID-19 #ConfinementJour7"

OFFICIAL REACTIONS TO THE “INFODEMIC”

Public authorities’ reaction: Government, European Union and International organizations

Faced with the growth of disinformation on social media, public authorities and governments have taken action to make authoritative information more visible. To them, the question of how to react to problematic content circulating online is difficult: taking action against misinformation risks limiting freedom of expression, yet allowing false information or hostile narratives to circulate online may pose a threat to national or citizens’ security¹⁴. Caught between the two, public authorities have attempted to find a middle ground by increasing access to verified information.

18

In mid-April, the French government added a subsection to their dedicated coronavirus information webpage, compiling selected news outlets that were conducting fact checks. This initiative however caused a backlash due to its infringement of freedom of the press and of their independence from public authorities, bringing to light another challenge when trying to intervene on issues related to freedom of expression. Shortly after, the page was deleted. The French Health Ministry also set up a task force to promote authoritative content, in contact with a diverse network of experts that work with the Ministry.

International organizations also reacted. The WHO stood out on February 2020 by shedding light on a neologism created in 2003 for the SARS “infodemic”. On a concrete level, the UN and the WHO organized a thorough response to the spread of misinformation through enhancing access to authoritative information. A “myth busters” page was created, key partnerships with platforms such as WhatsApp or Rakuten Viber were put in place, and webinars on disinformation organized in order to increase the reach of verified information.

¹⁴ This dilemma has led to the decision from the French Conseil Constitutionnel given on June 18th 2020 concerning the law against hateful content on the Internet (also known as Loi Avia), to revoke its 1st article, which forced platforms to delete “manifestly illegal” hate speech signalled by users within 24 hours of notice, and asked to remove terrorist content and child pornography within one hour following an administrative order from police.

The European Union responded to the crisis in a similar manner through fact checking resources on the European Commission and the European Parliament websites. Such informative action was strengthened by the creation of a coronavirus resources hub on the EEAS EUvsDisinfo website. The EU’s Joint Communication on “Tackling Covid-19 disinformation” by all EU institutions, published on 10th June, identifies an array of actions for the EU’s future strategy against “infodemics”. For example, it asks platforms to provide more data for public scrutiny, to produce monthly reports with detailed data on their actions to promote authoritative content or improve users’ awareness and to strengthen the EU Rapid Alert System’s capacities.

Platforms

Major technology companies have introduced a series of responses to the Covid-19 ‘infodemic’ from March to May 2020. These platforms have been forced to mobilize at speed, trialling policies and enforcement approaches that can meet such a challenge, while balancing the need to prevent the spread of viral disinformation with the protection of free expression. ISD conducted an assessment¹⁵ of the approaches employed to date by Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google and YouTube, including specific services and policies introduced in recent months and, where possible, the accompanying rationale from companies themselves.

19

Such measures included:

- Covid-19 information hubs that share verified updates from sources like the World Health Organization (WHO), Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and national health ministries, including guidance tailored by geography;
- Partnerships with independent fact-checking networks such as Poynter IFCN to verify or debunk claims around the pandemic;
- Labelling, downranking and/or removing content flagged as false or misleading by experts;
- Official health alerts prompted by ‘coronavirus’ and related search terms;
- Prohibiting ads that aim to profiteer off the pandemic, including inflated prices for Personal Protective Equipment and unproven remedies, diagnostic tests or cures;
- Updated moderation policies to cover broadened definitions of ‘harm’, including content that contradicts public health guidance, creates panic based on fake claims, impersonates government officials, circulates unverified advice, and/or promotes scapegoating of certain groups;

¹⁵ <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-first-100-days/>

- Free advertising credits for government and multilateral public health bodies, to increase the visibility of key guidance and updates.

In order to evaluate the impact of these measures, evidence was compiled from ISD's own research and a wide range of civil society, academic and trusted media sources. Although it is not specific to France, the collected evidence indicates that overall these efforts have failed to stem the tide of disinformation, weaponized hate, profiteering, conspiracy theories and other harmful behaviors surrounding the pandemic.

The assessment found a continual disconnect between the formulation and intent of new policies, and their comprehensive enforcement on and across platforms. False and misleading content around Covid-19 is still widely circulated, despite being flagged by experts. Extremists from across the ideological spectrum are hijacking Covid-19 content to spread their message, from the far-right to Islamist terrorist groups. Automated and inauthentic accounts are promoting Covid-19 disinformation and the related policy agendas of foreign states. Both Google and Facebook continue to host advertisements banned under their new Covid-19 guidelines.

Social media platforms are faced with an unprecedented challenge to which no-one has a clear answer. However, whilst disinformation cannot be fully removed from online spaces, more can be done to address the issue, including the increase of transparency to foster joint efforts between platforms, governments and civil society. It should be noted that without better access to data and insight on companies' decisionmaking systems, both human- and machine-led, it is not possible to determine with certainty why some areas of policy appear more effective or better enforced than others. The examples of disinformation used in the assessment were exposed despite minimal data access. Despite the reliance of these conclusions on some element of extrapolation and inference, these cases likely represent a very small proportion of the true scale of the problem on these platforms.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 information crisis is not merely a reminder about the need for ongoing vigilance on disinformation and foreign interference, nor is it specific to health misinformation. It's a sign that we must urgently build policy frameworks that control and mitigate the risks the Internet is posing to our information ecosystem and democratic societies.

Overall, our study finds that:

- The influencers that gather around far-right themes ("nationalists" or "anti-Islam") are **the most sensitive to messages that both promote authoritative regimes and show Europe's weaknesses**. We suggest that those are clearly identified targets for foreign actors. In parallel, these communities were the most interested in the pieces of disinformation and conspiracy theories we looked at. Interestingly, the community centered on the Yellow Vest movement, which started as a non-partisan social protest, also falls into this category.
- The influencers that gather around themes associated with far-left themes ("anti-capitalists") are **relatively immune to overt pro-authoritarian narratives. They will be more interested in reading about Europe's weaknesses**; they are also more interested in pieces of disinformation and conspiracy theories that concern corporations and include an economic dimension.
- Finally, our study shows that the influencers that gather around technology and health issues are **impermeable to narratives that do not concern them directly**. The messages that interest these communities are tailored to their themes.

Information, whether true or false, mostly circulates in communities that are interested in it. This has consequences for the way public actors and platforms consider content moderation. The fact that actors can take advantage of events such as the Covid-19 crisis to craft messages that meet these interests and serve political goals is a concern for governments. This is legitimate, and actions must be taken to reinforce the West's position in the information contest¹⁶. But these actions must go beyond content itself, since deleting content fails to address the interest French and Western citizens have in such narratives. They should focus on fundamentally rethinking the relationship between regulators and platforms to better understand the fragilities of public debates, and fully consider communication infrastructures and security in geopolitical strategies.

¹⁶ This is argued by Laura Rosenberger, Director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

These unprecedented times have exposed that the information playing field is not level, and force us to find new analytical resources and response mechanisms. Most government initiatives in France and from social media platforms have focused on sharing reliable information on the virus. This is a necessary step, however it is not a sufficient response to foreign interference. Overall, a lot of progress has already been made across these sectors, with increased investment in multi-stakeholders' efforts to reverse the dynamic and "fix the internet" either through regulatory, technological, advocacy or educational approaches. Examples include the EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech, the EU Code of practice on disinformation, the French and German laws on content, or the UK online harms white paper.

However, policy approaches remain fragmented and lack harmonization at the supra-national level, between sectors or even between ministries and departments within governments. Most importantly, most of these approaches have focused on removing content from platforms, and finding legitimate criteria to do so. Our study shows that many narratives that can be used to weaken Western democracies would not be considered illegal, or in contravention of a platform's terms of service. Pro-authoritarian and anti-European narratives are successful because Western citizens are interested in them. They are a challenge that France and other democracies have to face, and will continue to face.

It is not our ambition to share a comprehensive list of recommendations. Instead, we will highlight three key dimensions to ensure that democratic societies continue to develop their understanding of the challenges ahead, to successfully navigate a world of online influence and manipulations:

- 1. Governments** need to recognize this challenge as a priority area, by continuing to make accessible and feature reliable information on issues of public health, pushing and supporting authoritative institutions to get their message out in the most transparent, accessible and compelling ways for everyone in the digital era, and in coordination with the press and civil society when relevant. However, there is also a need to create new regulation to open up channels of communication between platforms and governments, to incentivize companies to share information, and to require more transparency from platforms, including through audit mechanisms.
- 2. Researchers** need to have access to more data from online platforms to understand the fragilities of public debates and the extent to which they are exploited by foreign actors. The real-time reporting on disinformation and polarization campaigns, their actors, and their tactics to target specific vulnerable groups, to disrupt democratic processes and information mechanisms, and to sow discord

and distrust in public institutions, is essential to helping governments understand the scope of the challenge and to make communication infrastructures a priority in State-level relations.

- 3. Online intermediary platforms** must be responsible for prioritising authoritative information and sources, deplatforming malign ones, and down-ranking and clearly labelling misinformation. New regulation should lead them to undertake robust and transparent research that informs the design of products and effective moderation systems that balance privacy, safety and freedom of expression.

THE 37 MESSAGES OBSERVED IN THIS STUDY

Pro-authoritarian narratives

Promoting Russia

- 1) Unlike Russia, Western Democracies provide coronavirus assistance to gain political benefits
- 2) Russian aid played a key role in slowing spread of covid-19 in Italy

Russia as a victim

- 3) Western backed anti-government forces use the Covid-19 crisis to destabilize Russia
- 4) Poland did not let the Russian planes delivering aid to Italy cross its air space

Promoting China

- 5) China's political system prevails over the EU in the fight against Covid-19
- 6) China is saving Europe by exporting masks

China as a victim

- 7) Covid-19 was created by the USA to weaken China

Authoritarian interpretations

- 8) Coronavirus pandemic is exaggerated in order to turn countries into fascist hygiene dictatorships
- 9) Under the guise of force majeure Germany and EU became autocratic

Anti-Europe narratives

Weakness of the European Union

- 10) Italy has been left alone by the EU member states in the face of the pandemic
- 11) EU has failed Greece, Spain (economically) and now Italy (coronavirus)
- 12) The EU only cares for profits and money

The end of the European project

- 13) The coronavirus leads to the end of the EU

Anti-liberal messages

- 14) Only authoritarian states and closed societies will be able to protect their populations from the coronavirus and from future pandemics
- 15) Coronavirus exposes the weaknesses of European humanism
- 16) The global liberal world has collapsed

French conspiracy theories

Chloroquine - Buzin/Lévy

- 17) The couple Buzyn/Lévy wrecked Pr. Raoult's work and is against the use of chloroquine / Agnès Buzyn has forbidden the free sale of chloroquine in the middle of a pandemic

Government and business

France and the government

- 18) France spends fifty times more for the defence sector than for health
- 19) Empty hospitals in France show that the government is lying about the gravity of coronavirus
- 20) The state validated a medical protocol using Plaquenil
- 21) Staff in nursing homes vacated their job during the crisis

Pharmaceutical companies

- 22) Pharmaceutical and food industries are using the panic to sell vaccines and push towards consumption

Fake cures

- 27) Zinc, heat, tea, roquefort, kill coronavirus

Others *(found in very small proportions)*

Xenophobia

- 28) Migrants are spreading the virus
- 29) Muslim and African populations have specific quarantine rules
- 30) Foreigners do not abide by the lockdown rules and are attacking law enforcement agencies

Institut Pasteur (a French medical foundation)

- 31) The coronavirus was created by the Institut Pasteur

Responsibility of the United States

- 32) The coronavirus creator is American and has been arrested
- 33) Covid-19 brings attention to secret US laboratories in the border of China and Russia
- 34) The US created the virus back in 2015

Anti-elites, including Bill Gates

- 35) Bill Gates is behind the coronavirus
- 36) The rich have a cure

Conspiracies against Trump

- 37) Covid-19 is a deep state plot against Trump

5G

5G

- 23) Correlation between 5G deployment and the pandemic

Health

Chinese bioweapon

- 24) Covid-19 is a Chinese bioweapon

Dangerous information

- 25) Bleach, alcohol, cocaine can cure coronavirus
- 26) Washing hands is useless

APPENDIX 2

THE MESSAGES IN FRENCH THEMATIC COMMUNITIES

The tables below show the percentages of messages posted by the six communities that belong to the various themes identified. The tables should be read, for example, “of all the messages in our corpus posted by the French nationalist community, 2% promote China’s handling of the crisis”. The percentages can add up to more than 100% over the two tables (for example, the sum of all percentages over the two tables for the French nationalist community is 105%). This is because one message can belong to two categories (for example, one message can include keywords that are related to the promotion of Russia and to Europe’s weaknesses).

Table 1: Pro-authoritarian and anti-European narratives in French thematic communities

| | | French nationalist | Anti- Islam | Yellow Vests | Anti-technology | Naturalist | Anti-capitalism |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| Pro-authoritarian narratives | Promoting Russia | 15% | 12% | 10% | 0% | 7% | 7% |
| | Russia as a victim | 0% | 0% | 2% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Promoting China | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| | China as a victim | 8% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 7% | 4% |
| | Authoritarian interpretations | 3% | 3% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 4% |
| | | | | | | | |
| Anti-Europe narratives | Europe’s weaknesses | 14% | 16% | 8% | 2% | 6% | 13% |
| | The end of the European project | 8% | 7% | 5% | 0% | 6% | 15% |
| | Anti-liberal messages | 3% | 1% | 6% | 7% | 6% | 15% |

Read “of all the messages in our corpus posted by the French nationalist community, 2% promote China’s handling of the crisis”.

Table 2: Disinformation and conspiracy theories in French thematic communities

| | | French nationalist | Anti- Islam | Yellow Vests | Anti-technology | Naturalist | Anti-capitalism |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| French conspiracy theories | Chloroquine - Buzin/Lévy | 25% | 37% | 24% | 7% | 9% | 15% |
| Government and business | France and the government | 2% | 1% | 3% | 0% | 4% | 13% |
| | Pharmaceutical companies | 2% | 3% | 2% | 0% | 4% | 6% |
| 5G | 5G | 8% | 2% | 20% | 66% | 42% | 16% |
| Health | Chinese bioweapon | 13% | 8% | 6% | 18% | 12% | 4% |
| | Dangerous information | 0% | 2% | 0% | 0% | 3% | 1% |
| | Fake cures | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| Others (found in very small proportions) | Xenophobia | 3% | 3% | 4% | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| | Institut Pasteur | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Responsibility of the United States | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Anti-elites, including Bill Gates | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Conspiracies against Trump | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | | | | | | | |

Read “of all the messages in our corpus posted by the French nationalist community, 2% were disinformation on France and the government”.

Table 3: A comparison of the circulation of messages in French communities, ratios

The table shows the spread of each disinformation message through various communities. Here, compared to the former tables, the community that shared a particular message in the highest percentage becomes a reference (100%). For the same message, ratios are made in comparison to that highest percentage. The table thus offers an overview of which group engages more with particular topics, in comparison to other communities. For example, in the former tables, messages promoting Russia represent 15% of messages shared by influencers claiming to be French nationalists. In this table, because 15% is the highest percentage for that particular message, it becomes the reference (100%). Other percentages for that particular message are calculated compared to that reference.

| | | Influenceurs claiming to be... | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| | | French nationalist | Anti- Islam | Yellow Vests | Anti-technology | Naturalist | Anti-capitalism |
| Pro-authoritarian narratives | Promoting Russia | 100% | 80% | 67% | 0% | 47% | 47% |
| | Russia as a victim | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Promoting China | 67% | 100% | 33% | 67% | 67% | 67% |
| | China as a victim | 67% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 58% | 33% |
| | Authoritarian interpretations | 50% | 50% | 100% | 17% | 17% | 67% |
| French conspiracy theory | Chloroquine and the Buzyn-Lévy conspiracy | 68% | 100% | 65% | 19% | 24% | 41% |
| Anti-Europe | Europe's weaknesses | 88% | 100% | 50% | 13% | 38% | 81% |
| | The end of the European project | 53% | 47% | 33% | 0% | 40% | 100% |
| | Anti-liberal messages | 20% | 7% | 40% | 47% | 40% | 100% |

| | | Influenceurs claiming to be... | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| | | French nationalist | Anti- Islam | Yellow Vests | Anti-technology | Naturalist | Anti-capitalism |
| Government and business | France and the government | 15% | 8% | 23% | 0% | 31% | 100% |
| | Pharmaceutical companies | 33% | 50% | 33% | 0% | 33% | 100% |
| 5G | 5G | 12% | 3% | 30% | 100% | 64% | 24% |
| Health | Chinese bioweapon | 72% | 44% | 33% | 100% | 67% | 22% |
| | Dangerous information | 0% | 67% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 33% |
| | Fake cures | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |
| Others (found in very small proportions) | Xenophobia | 75% | 75% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 25% |
| | Institut Pasteur | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Responsibility of the United States | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Anti-Elites, including Bill Gates | 100% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| | Conspiracy against Trump | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Institut Montaigne's team, especially **Angèle Malâtre-Lansac**, Associate Director, Healthcare Policy, **Laure Millet**, Head of Healthcare Policy Program, and **Margaux Tellier**, Assistant Policy Officer, for their help navigating technical information linked to Covid-19 and their careful appraisal of the note, as well as **Michel Duclos**, Special Advisor, Geopolitics, **Mathieu Duchâtel**, Director of the Asia Program, **Mahaut de Fougères**, Policy Officer, International Studies, and **Alexandre Robinet-Borgomano**, Head of Europe Program, for their understanding of influence strategies outside of social media. We would also like to thank **Pierre-François Jan**, Senior Consultant and Director of Development at Pergamon, for his precise and detailed feedback on the note. At the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, we are particularly thankful to **Henry Tuck**, Head of Policy & Research, **Cooper Gatewood**, Digital Research Manager, and **Zoé Fourel**, Associate, for always placing the French context in a wider perspective, as well as **Hannah Martin**, Communications Manager, for making the publication possible.

The opinions expressed in this policy paper are not necessarily those of the above-mentioned persons or of the institutions that they represent.

OUR PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

- Transatlantic Trends 2020 (juillet 2020)
- Europe's Pushback on China (juin 2020)
- E-santé : augmentons la dose! (juin 2020)
- Dividende carbone : une carte à jouer pour l'Europe (juin 2020)
- L'action publique face à la crise du Covid-19 (juin 2020)
- Seine-Saint-Denis : les batailles de l'emploi et de l'insertion (mai 2020)
- Rebondir face au Covid-19 : relançons l'investissement (mai 2020)
- Rebondir face au Covid-19 : l'enjeu du temps de travail (mai 2020)
- Internet : le péril jeune? (avril 2020)
- Covid-19 : l'Asie orientale face à la pandémie (avril 2020)
- Algorithmes : contrôle des biais S.V.P. (mars 2020)
- Retraites : pour un régime équilibré (mars 2020)
- Espace : le réveil de l'Europe? (février 2020)
- Données personnelles : comment gagner la bataille? (décembre 2019)
- Transition énergétique : faisons jouer nos réseaux (décembre 2019)
- Religion au travail : croire au dialogue - Baromètre du Fait Religieux Entreprise 2019 (novembre 2019)
- Taxes de production : préservons les entreprises dans les territoires (octobre 2019)
- Médicaments innovants : prévenir pour mieux guérir (septembre 2019)
- Rénovation énergétique : chantier accessible à tous (juillet 2019)
- Agir pour la parité : performance à la clé (juillet 2019)
- Pour réussir la transition énergétique (juin 2019)
- Europe-Afrique : partenaires particuliers (juin 2019)
- Media polarization « à la française »? Comparing the French and American ecosystems (mai 2019)
- L'Europe et la 5G : le cas Huawei (partie 2, mai 2019)
- L'Europe et la 5G : passons la cinquième! (partie 1, mai 2019)
- Système de santé : soyez consultés! (avril 2019)
- Travailleurs des plateformes : liberté oui, protection aussi (avril 2019)
- Action publique : pourquoi faire compliqué quand on peut faire simple (mars 2019)
- La France en morceaux : baromètre des Territoires 2019 (février 2019)
- Énergie solaire en Afrique : un avenir rayonnant? (février 2019)
- IA et emploi en santé : quoi de neuf docteur? (janvier 2019)
- Cybermenace : avis de tempête (novembre 2018)
- Partenariat franco-britannique de défense et de sécurité : améliorer notre coopération (novembre 2018)
- Sauver le droit d'asile (octobre 2018)
- Industrie du futur, prêts, partez! (septembre 2018)

- La fabrique de l'islamisme (septembre 2018)
- Protection sociale : une mise à jour vitale (mars 2018)
- Innovation en santé : soignons nos talents (mars 2018)
- Travail en prison : préparer (vraiment) l'après (février 2018)
- ETI : taille intermédiaire, gros potentiel (janvier 2018)
- Réforme de la formation professionnelle : allons jusqu'au bout! (janvier 2018)
- Espace : l'Europe contre-attaque? (décembre 2017)
- Justice : faites entrer le numérique (novembre 2017)
- Apprentissage : les trois clés d'une véritable transformation (octobre 2017)
- Prêts pour l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui? (septembre 2017)
- Nouveau monde arabe, nouvelle « politique arabe » pour la France (août 2017)
- Enseignement supérieur et numérique : connectez-vous! (juin 2017)
- Syrie : en finir avec une guerre sans fin (juin 2017)
- Énergie : priorité au climat! (juin 2017)
- Quelle place pour la voiture demain? (mai 2017)
- Sécurité nationale : quels moyens pour quelles priorités? (avril 2017)
- Tourisme en France : cliquez ici pour rafraîchir (mars 2017)
- L'Europe dont nous avons besoin (mars 2017)
- Dernière chance pour le paritarisme de gestion (mars 2017)
- L'impossible État actionnaire? (janvier 2017)
- Un capital emploi formation pour tous (janvier 2017)
- Économie circulaire, réconcilier croissance et environnement (novembre 2016)
- Traité transatlantique : pourquoi persévérer (octobre 2016)
- Un islam français est possible (septembre 2016)
- Refonder la sécurité nationale (septembre 2016)
- Brexit ou Brexit : Europe, prépare ton avenir! (juin 2016)
- Réanimer le système de santé - Propositions pour 2017 (juin 2016)
- Nucléaire : l'heure des choix (juin 2016)
- Un autre droit du travail est possible (mai 2016)
- Les primaires pour les Nuls (avril 2016)
- Le numérique pour réussir dès l'école primaire (mars 2016)
- Retraites : pour une réforme durable (février 2016)
- Décentralisation : sortons de la confusion / Repenser l'action publique dans les territoires (janvier 2016)
- Terreur dans l'Hexagone (décembre 2015)
- Climat et entreprises : de la mobilisation à l'action / Sept propositions pour préparer l'après-COP21 (novembre 2015)
- Discriminations religieuses à l'embauche : une réalité (octobre 2015)
- Pour en finir avec le chômage (septembre 2015)
- Sauver le dialogue social (septembre 2015)

- Politique du logement : faire sauter les verrous (juillet 2015)
- Faire du bien vieillir un projet de société (juin 2015)
- Dépense publique : le temps de l'action (mai 2015)
- Apprentissage : un vaccin contre le chômage des jeunes (mai 2015)
- Big Data et objets connectés. Faire de la France un champion de la révolution numérique (avril 2015)
- Université : pour une nouvelle ambition (avril 2015)
- Rallumer la télévision : 10 propositions pour faire rayonner l'audiovisuel français (février 2015)
- Marché du travail : la grande fracture (février 2015)
- Concilier efficacité économique et démocratie : l'exemple mutualiste (décembre 2014)
- Résidences Seniors : une alternative à développer (décembre 2014)
- Business schools : rester des champions dans la compétition internationale (novembre 2014)
- Prévention des maladies psychiatriques : pour en finir avec le retard français (octobre 2014)
- Temps de travail : mettre fin aux blocages (octobre 2014)
- Réforme de la formation professionnelle : entre avancées, occasions manquées et pari financier (septembre 2014)
- Dix ans de politiques de diversité : quel bilan? (septembre 2014)
- Et la confiance, bordel? (août 2014)
- Gaz de schiste : comment avancer (juillet 2014)
- Pour une véritable politique publique du renseignement (juillet 2014)
- Rester le leader mondial du tourisme, un enjeu vital pour la France (juin 2014)
- 1151 milliards d'euros de dépenses publiques : quels résultats? (février 2014)
- Comment renforcer l'Europe politique (janvier 2014)
- Améliorer l'équité et l'efficacité de l'assurance-chômage (décembre 2013)
- Santé : faire le pari de l'innovation (décembre 2013)
- Afrique-France : mettre en œuvre le co-développement Contribution au XXVI^e sommet Afrique-France (décembre 2013)
- Chômage : inverser la courbe (octobre 2013)
- Mettre la fiscalité au service de la croissance (septembre 2013)
- Vive le long terme! Les entreprises familiales au service de la croissance et de l'emploi (septembre 2013)
- Habitat : pour une transition énergétique ambitieuse (septembre 2013)
- Commerce extérieur : refuser le déclin
Propositions pour renforcer notre présence dans les échanges internationaux (juillet 2013)
- Pour des logements sobres en consommation d'énergie (juillet 2013)
- 10 propositions pour refonder le patronat (juin 2013)

- Accès aux soins : en finir avec la fracture territoriale (mai 2013)
- Nouvelle réglementation européenne des agences de notation : quels bénéfices attendre? (avril 2013)
- Remettre la formation professionnelle au service de l'emploi et de la compétitivité (mars 2013)
- Faire vivre la promesse laïque (mars 2013)
- Pour un « New Deal » numérique (février 2013)
- Intérêt général : que peut l'entreprise? (janvier 2013)
- Redonner sens et efficacité à la dépense publique 15 propositions pour 60 milliards d'économies (décembre 2012)
- Les juges et l'économie : une défiance française? (décembre 2012)
- Restaurer la compétitivité de l'économie française (novembre 2012)
- Faire de la transition énergétique un levier de compétitivité (novembre 2012)
- Réformer la mise en examen Un impératif pour renforcer l'État de droit (novembre 2012)
- Transport de voyageurs : comment réformer un modèle à bout de souffle? (novembre 2012)
- Comment concilier régulation financière et croissance : 20 propositions (novembre 2012)
- Taxe professionnelle et finances locales : premier pas vers une réforme globale? (septembre 2012)
- Remettre la notation financière à sa juste place (juillet 2012)
- Réformer par temps de crise (mai 2012)
- Insatisfaction au travail : sortir de l'exception française (avril 2012)
- Vademecum 2007 – 2012 : Objectif Croissance (mars 2012)
- Financement des entreprises : propositions pour la présidentielle (mars 2012)
- Une fiscalité au service de la « social compétitivité » (mars 2012)
- La France au miroir de l'Italie (février 2012)
- Pour des réseaux électriques intelligents (février 2012)
- Un CDI pour tous (novembre 2011)
- Repenser la politique familiale (octobre 2011)
- Formation professionnelle : pour en finir avec les réformes inabouties (octobre 2011)
- Banlieue de la République (septembre 2011)
- De la naissance à la croissance : comment développer nos PME (juin 2011)
- Reconstruire le dialogue social (juin 2011)
- Adapter la formation des ingénieurs à la mondialisation (février 2011)
- « Vous avez le droit de garder le silence... » Comment réformer la garde à vue (décembre 2010)
- Gone for Good? Partis pour de bon?
Les expatriés de l'enseignement supérieur français aux États-Unis (novembre 2010)

- 15 propositions pour l'emploi des jeunes et des seniors (septembre 2010)
- Afrique - France. Réinventer le co-développement (juin 2010)
- Vaincre l'échec à l'école primaire (avril 2010)
- Pour un Eurobond. Une stratégie coordonnée pour sortir de la crise (février 2010)
- Réforme des retraites : vers un big-bang? (mai 2009)
- Mesurer la qualité des soins (février 2009)
- Ouvrir la politique à la diversité (janvier 2009)
- Engager le citoyen dans la vie associative (novembre 2008)
- Comment rendre la prison (enfin) utile (septembre 2008)
- Infrastructures de transport : lesquelles bâtir, comment les choisir? (juillet 2008)
- HLM, parc privé
Deux pistes pour que tous aient un toit (juin 2008)
- Comment communiquer la réforme (mai 2008)
- Après le Japon, la France...
Faire du vieillissement un moteur de croissance (décembre 2007)
- Au nom de l'Islam... Quel dialogue avec les minorités musulmanes en Europe? (septembre 2007)
- L'exemple inattendu des Vets
Comment ressusciter un système public de santé (juin 2007)
- Vademecum 2007-2012. Moderniser la France (mai 2007)
- Après Erasmus, Amicus. Pour un service civique universel européen (avril 2007)
- Quelle politique de l'énergie pour l'Union européenne? (mars 2007)
- Sortir de l'immobilité sociale à la française (novembre 2006)
- Avoir des leaders dans la compétition universitaire mondiale (octobre 2006)
- Comment sauver la presse quotidienne d'information (août 2006)
- Pourquoi nos PME ne grandissent pas (juillet 2006)
- Mondialisation : réconcilier la France avec la compétitivité (juin 2006)
- TVA, CSG, IR, cotisations...
Comment financer la protection sociale (mai 2006)
- Pauvreté, exclusion : ce que peut faire l'entreprise (février 2006)
- Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité (janvier 2006)
- Immobilier de l'État : quoi vendre, pourquoi, comment (décembre 2005)
- 15 pistes (parmi d'autres...) pour moderniser la sphère publique (novembre 2005)
- Ambition pour l'agriculture, libertés pour les agriculteurs (juillet 2005)
- Hôpital : le modèle invisible (juin 2005)
- Un Contrôleur général pour les Finances publiques (février 2005)
- Les oubliés de l'égalité des chances (janvier 2004 - Réédition septembre 2005)

For previous publications, see our website:

www.institutmontaigne.org/en

INSTITUT MONTAIGNE



ABB FRANCE
 ABBVIE
 ACCURACY
 ACTIVEO
 ADIT
 ADVANCY
 AIR FRANCE - KLM
 AIR LIQUIDE
 AIRBUS
 ALKEN ASSET MANAGEMENT
 ALLEN & OVERY
 ALLIANZ
 ALVAREZ & MARSAL FRANCE
 AMAZON WEB SERVICES
 AMBER CAPITAL
 AMUNDI
 ARCHERY STRATEGY CONSULTING
 ARCHIMED
 ARDIAN
 ASTORG
 ASTRAZENECA
 AUGUST DEBOUZY
 AVRIL
 AXA
 BAKER & MCKENZIE
 BANK OF AMERICA MERRILL LYNCH
 BEARINGPOINT
 BESSE
 BNP PARIBAS
 BOLLORE
 BOUGARTCHEV MOYNE ASSOCIÉS
 BOUYGUES
 BROUSSE VERGEZ
 BRUNSWICK
 CAISSE DES DÉPÔTS
 CANDRIAM
 CAPGEMINI
 CAPITAL GROUP
 CAREIT
 CARREFOUR
 CASINO
 CHAÎNE THERMALE DU SOLEIL
 CHUBB
 CIS
 CISCO SYSTEMS FRANCE
 CMA CGM
 CNP ASSURANCES
 COHEN AMIR-ASLANI
 COMPAGNIE PLASTIC OMNIUM

C O R P O R A T E M E M B E R S

INSTITUT MONTAIGNE



CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DU NOTARIAT
 CORREZE & ZAMBEZE
 CRÉDIT AGRICOLE
 CRÉDIT FONCIER DE FRANCE
 D'ANGELIN & CO.LTD
 DASSAULT SYSTÈMES
 DE PARDIEU BROCAS MAFFEI
 DENTSU AEGIS NETWORK
 DRIVE INNOVATION INSIGHT - DII
 EDF
 EDHEC BUSINESS SCHOOL
 EDWARDS LIFESCIENCES
 ELSAN
 ENEDIS
 ENGIE
 EQUANCY
 ESL & NETWORK
 ETHIQUE & DÉVELOPPEMENT
 EURAZEO
 EUROGROUP CONSULTING
 EUROSTAR
 FIVES
 FONCIA GROUPE
 FONCIÈRE INEA
 GALILEO GLOBAL EDUCATION
 GETLINK
 GIDE LOYRETTE NOUËL
 GOOGLE
 GRAS SAVOYE
 GROUPAMA
 GROUPE EDMOND DE ROTHSCHILD
 GROUPE M6
 GROUPE ORANGE
 HAMEUR ET CIE
 HENNER
 HSBC FRANCE
 IBM FRANCE
 IFPASS
 ING BANK FRANCE
 INKARN
 INSEEC
 INTERNATIONAL SOS
 INTERPARFUMS
 IONIS EDUCATION GROUP
 ISRP
 JEANTET ASSOCIÉS
 KANTAR
 KATALYSE
 KEARNEY

C O R P O R A T E M E M B E R S

INSTITUT MONTAIGNE



KEDGE BUSINESS SCHOOL
KKR
KPMG S.A.
LA BANQUE POSTALE
LA PARISIENNE ASSURANCES
LAZARD FRÈRES
LINEDATA SERVICES
LIR
LIVANOVA
L'ORÉAL
LOXAM
LVMH
M.CHARRAIRE
MACSF
MALAKOFF HUMANIS
MAREMMA
MAZARS
MCKINSEY & COMPANY FRANCE
MÉDIA-PARTICIPATIONS
MEDIOBANCA
MERCER
MERIDIAM
MICHELIN
MICROSOFT FRANCE
MITSUBISHI FRANCE S.A.S
MOELIS & COMPANY
NATIXIS
NEHS
NESTLÉ
NEXITY
OBEA
ODDO BHF
ONDRA PARTNERS
ONEPOINT
ONET
OPTIGESTION
ORANO
ORTEC GROUPE
OWKIN
PAI PARTNERS
PERGAMON
PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS
PRUDENTIA CAPITAL
RADIAL
RAISE
RAMSAY GÉNÉRALE DE SANTÉ
RANDSTAD
RATP
RELX GROUP

C O R P O R A T E M E M B E R S

INSTITUT MONTAIGNE



RENAULT
REXEL
RICOL LASTEYRIE CORPORATE FINANCE
RIVOLIER
ROCHE
ROLAND BERGER
ROTHSCHILD MARTIN MAUREL
SAFRAN
SANOFI
SAP FRANCE
SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC
SERVIER
SGS
SIA PARTNERS
SIACI SAINT HONORÉ
SIEMENS FRANCE
SIER CONSTRUCTEUR
SNCF
SNCF RÉSEAU
SODEXO
SOFINORD - ARMONIA
SOLVAY
SPRINKLR
SPVIE
STAN
SUEZ
TALAN
TECNET PARTICIPATIONS SARL
TEREGA
THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP
TILDER
TOTAL
TRANSDEV
UBER
UBS FRANCE
UIPATH
VEOLIA
VINCI
VIVENDI
VOYAGEURS DU MONDE
WAVESTONE
WAZE
WENDEL
WILLIS TOWERS
WORLDAPPEAL

C O R P O R A T E M E M B E R S

INSTITUT MONTAIGNE



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT

Henri de Castries

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

David Azéma Partner, Perella Weinberg Partners

Emmanuelle Barbara Senior Partner, August Debouzy

Marguerite Bérard Head of French Retail Banking, BNP Paribas

Jean-Pierre Clamadieu Chairman of the Board of Directors, Engie

Olivier Duhamel Chairman, FNSP (Sciences Po)

Marwan Lahoud Partner, Tikehau Capital

Fleur Pellerin Founder and CEO, Korelya Capital

Natalie Rastoin Senior Advisor, WPP

René Ricol Founding Partner, Ricol Lasteyrie Corporate Finance

Jean-Dominique Senard Chairman, Renault

Arnaud Vaissié Co-founder, Chairman and CEO, International SOS

Florence Verzelen Deputy Executive Director, Dassault Systèmes

Philippe Wahl Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Groupe La Poste

HONORARY PRESIDENT

Claude Bébéar Founder & Honorary Chairman, AXA



THERE IS NO DESIRE MORE NATURAL THAN THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE

Information Manipulations Around Covid-19: France Under Attack

The Covid-19 sanitary crisis was accompanied by a multiplicity of rumors, disinformation and misinformation pieces as well as conspiracy theories online. However, have these messages circulated evenly across the web? To answer this question, Institut Montaigne and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue investigated the circulation of different narratives and pieces of disinformation in French discussion groups, based on data collected by Linkfluence.

The Covid-19 crisis was utilized by various actors to serve pre-existing interests: the successful messages in a given community are those that meet its interests. Whilst language and context remain barriers to entry for the massive circulation of international pieces of disinformation, the interests of French extremist communities in pro-authoritarian and anti-Europe messages brings to light France's vulnerabilities towards foreign interference in public debates.

Follow us on:



Sign up for our weekly newsletter on:
www.institutmontaigne.org/en

Institut Montaigne

59, rue La Boétie - 75008 Paris
Tél. +33 (0)1 53 89 05 60
www.institutmontaigne.org/en

ISSN 1771-6756
JULY 2020