

AMPLIFYING FAR-RIGHT VOICES: A CASE STUDY ON INAUTHENTIC TACTICS USED BY THE ERIC ZEMMOUR CAMPAIGN

ISD finds evidence that the campaign team of Eric Zemmour deployed prohibited social media tactics on Facebook and Twitter to create a distorted perception of support ahead of the 2022 presidential and legislative elections in France.

During a project looking at disinformation in the French 2022 election cycle, the **Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)** identified a specific operation deployed by Zemmour's campaign team mobilising coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) across Twitter and Facebook. In our [new report](#), authored by Zoé Fourel and Cooper Gatewood, we expose how the Zemmour campaign team is linked to the inauthentic amplification of 12 petitions that were circulating online, with activity spiking during key moments on the campaign trail. On several occasions, petitions were re-purposed and shared on both platforms in a coordinated way at a strategic time for Zemmour. Tactics used consisted in original posts with the same text and cross-posting—when a post containing a link (in this case, a petition) is shared at a short interval (within one minute) of at least one other post containing the same link, which may also indicate coordinated activity. This activity was observed in official pages of Zemmour's party, Reconquête, and sometimes orchestrated by actors affiliated in official capacities, especially Samuel Lafont, the head of digital strategy of the Zemmour campaign. Lafont was found to be behind 10% of the original tweets posting at least one of the petitions. All petitions were set-up as websites by the group Les Amis d'Eric Zemmour between 26 Jan. 2021 and 5 June 2022. Additional, network analysis was conducted to understand the relationships between the different accounts sharing the petitions.

One noteworthy example observed was in the lead up to the debate before the second round of the presidential election. A petition targeting French president Emmanuel Macron on the McKinsey affair was created on 1 April and later re-purposed in the days before the debate on 20 April. Samuel Lafont was the first to share the petition on Twitter on 1 April and hours later it was shared 100 times by 100 different accounts using the same text as Lafont's post. On the day of the debate, Lafont shared it 24 times in less than five minutes as replies to posts from other candidates and tagged Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in what seems like an attempt at rallying anti-Macron sympathisers from across the political spectrum.

Other major key findings include:

- 20,205 out of the 30,650 original tweets sampled (excluding re-tweets) that shared at least one of the petitions were identified as potential cross-posts, a signal of CIB (in fact, 32% of original tweets shared one of the petitions within 15 seconds of another tweet containing the same link).
- Very few accounts were responsible for the majority of original tweets containing at least one petition. Just 0.57% of accounts posted 50% of the tweets, and four accounts were responsible for sharing over 21%. The account of Lafont was the most active account sharing these petitions (his was behind 10% of original tweets).
- This strategy peaked in March and April 2022, close to the first and second round of the presidential elections. Three of the petitions that were created closest to the presidential elections were among the most shared (in terms of the number of original posts that shared them) and demonstrated the highest levels of cross-posting. Further analysis indicates inauthentic behaviour, perhaps with the aim of increasing the candidate's visibility online, particularly closer to the dates of the votes.
- Sharing patterns indicate that the petitions were used to reach audiences outside of Zemmour's typical supporters. One of the strategies deployed by the Zemmour campaign team was to post petitions in reply to tweets from actors outside the Zemmour online sphere in order to gain visibility and potentially rally new support within other online communities. For the petitions shared closer to the presidential election, ISD found that accounts dedicated to sharing anti-vax, anti-sanitary restrictions and/or anti-Macron rhetoric were also involved in their sharing.

Key recommendations

Many of the behaviours identified in this investigation violate Twitter and Facebook's rules and community standards. Given the potential harms caused by inauthentic behaviour and coordinated inauthentic behaviour, especially in an electoral context, ISD offers a set of recommendations for platforms and governments to improve implementation of rules/community standards and to ensure action is taken against actors or networks engaging in inauthentic behaviour. These include:

- **Platforms, governments, fact-checking and media literacy education organisations should deploy more means to sensitise the public about the issues of CIB in a non-sensationalist but pedagogic and empowering way.** Currently, the public is still relatively unaware of deceptive digital campaign tactics used to support or attack parties and/or politicians. Respective electoral commissions can play a role in raising awareness among the public about amplification, micro-targeting and voter profiling tactics online. Additionally, platforms should invest in internal campaigns to raise awareness on the issues of inauthentic behaviour. They should also design identification, flagging and labelling systems that are more transparent for the user. Lastly, among other ideas, fact-checking and media literacy education orgs should also invest more in the creation of interactive resources and pedagogic videos to raise awareness on these issues.
- **Meaningfully invest in supporting independent collaborative research in order to build evidence and foster solutions, thereby increasing societal resilience to information manipulations.**
- **Create a race-to-the-top for both national and regional regulatory arenas in order to transition their approach from passive observation of platforms' self-regulation to being the real instruments of the DSA in action.**

Interviews with the authors are available on request.

The report is available on the ISD website in [French](#) and in [English](#). Analysis on our findings are also available in a [Digital Dispatch](#). Please direct enquiries to media@isdglobal.org.