



## Defending the Vote: France Acts to Combat Foreign Disinformation

After a hack-and-leak operation that targeted a candidate in France's 2017 presidential election and a social media campaign against the country's exports in 2020, the French government decided to take steps to protect its politics from foreign digital interference. With another national election approaching in April 2022, Lieutenant Colonel Marc-Antoine Brillant began designing a new unit that aimed to detect foreign information manipulation while preserving freedom of speech by separating responsibility for identification of attacks from responsibility for framing and executing a response. After the proposal cleared legal hurdles, Brillant's team, under the authority of the Secretariat-General for National Defense and Security, set up an interagency governance system, initiated a dialogue with social media platforms, and monitored social media to detect hostile campaigns. During the 2022 campaign, the unit, called Viginum, identified five foreign interference attempts and referred them to other parts of government that could decide whether and how to react. The elections ran smoothly, and the Viginum team started to focus on building stronger public understanding of its mission and activities.

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