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Brigitte Macron

Macrons hired investigators to research US influencer Candace Owens

Podcaster who claimed French first lady was born male had links to rightwing figures in Europe and the US

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Lawyers for Emmanuel and Brigitte Macron hired investigators to research the US podcaster Candace Owens as they prepared to sue her, leading to a compilation of details including about her ties to French far-right personalities and her popularity in Russian state media.

The Macrons are suing Owens, a prominent rightwing influencer in the US, over what they describe as "outlandish, defamatory and far-fetched fictions" in a podcast series that drew millions of listeners. Her central claim is that Brigitte Macron was born male.

The investigation, carried out by US-based firm Nardello & Co, was produced before the French president and first lady filed their lawsuit against Owens last month.

Some details from the investigation were shared with the Financial Times. As well as describing her links to the far right in France, investigators outlined her connections to rightwing populist figures in the US and UK and her online interactions with a Russian nationalist.

"The Macrons have brought this lawsuit with the full knowledge of who Owens is aligned with," said Dan Nardello, executive chair of Nardello & Co and a former New York federal prosecutor.

The decision to hire investigators highlights the seriousness with which the French president and first lady are treating the lawsuit and the resources they are willing to commit to the case, a rare example of a serving world leader suing an online influencer over their content.

Their decision to sue was driven in part by the Macrons' desire to understand why an American conservative podcaster had taken an interest in them, their lawyer Tom Clare, co-founder of defamation specialist firm Clare Locke, told the FT. He said the research could also help explain to a jury the context in which Owens was making the claims.

Owens said: "Brigitte Macron has once again been caught, and between lawyers, international PR teams, plus investigators, the couple is spending real money to quiet the paranoia of her past."

"Exactly how much money was spent to determine that out of a total of 12,704 tweets, I twice retweeted a Russian philosopher? Or that out of hundreds of speaking events worldwide, I once spoke at a conference in Paris with Marion Maréchal?"

Lawyers often commission investigations into people they intend to sue as part of their preparations for the cases or trials. The investigators' remit was to document Owens' published statements and detail her background and profile, based on publicly available information.

They outlined Owens' shift from identifying as a liberal early in her career to becoming a conservative after what she said was harassment online. She became a vocal supporter of Donald Trump, but recently broke with the US president and said she was "embarrassed" to have campaigned for him.

The investigators examined the origins of the claim that Brigitte Macron was born male. They found that while a Spanish blogger posted about it in May 2017, the idea gained traction in France from 2021. In late 2023, Xavier Poussard, the former editor-in-chief of a French far-right fringe publication called Faits et Documents, helped spread the claims.

Poussard said in an online video in April 2024 that he had translated his work about Brigitte Macron into English and sent it to Owens and "other Trumpists" whom he did not name.

The information he shared included the conclusions of his own investigation, and several news stories from other media

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organisations, such as an article published by the Daily Mail that covered the claims.

"I think she [Owens] knew nothing about Brigitte Macron only a month before, and suddenly she takes on the case, and says she is putting her career on the line" to reveal this, he said, adding this had been "a real boost from the Trump entourage".

Poussard later wrote a book titled Becoming Brigitte, a title Owens would use for her own podcast about the Macrons.

Owens' first reference to the theory came in a March 2024 episode of her show in which she mentioned a 2021 Daily Mail report headlined "The proof France's First Lady WASN'T born a man", the investigation found. She also did a lengthy interview with Poussard on the podcast, casting him as a truth-teller that the Macrons were trying to shut down.

The investigators found that once Owens' Becoming Brigitte series was released, Russian state-controlled outlets reported on it. It was covered by Tsargrad, a television channel led by Konstantin Malofeev, whom the researchers described as an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, they found. Russia's RT has posted about Owens more than 30 times since 2018, they found.

They did not find evidence that Owens had met Russian officials or state media personalities, or had direct personal or business links to Russia.

But Owens has interacted on social media with Alexander Dugin, a Russian nationalist and philosopher, the investigation found, with the two reposting each other's posts multiple times.

The investigators also found Owens had connections with French far-right politician Marion Maréchal, the niece of French far-right leader Marine Le Pen. Maréchal is no longer in Le Pen's Rassemblement National party, having joined a rival party that espouses harder positions on immigration and social issues.

Owens was the headline speaker at the 2019 Convention de la Droite conference in Paris, organised by far-right and nationalist organisations close to Maréchal, who also spoke at the event. Owens and Maréchal have also posted about each other on the social media site X, investigators found.

The investigation also outlined Owens' online criticism of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, including calling him a "sociopathic murdering welfare queen" and describing him as "the neighbourhood crackhead".

It found Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, was reported to have been a guest of honour at Owens' wedding to George Farmer, the former boss of social media platform Parler. It highlighted her connection to Tucker Carlson, who has interviewed her online, and her posts about the brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate.

The Macrons' lawsuit, filed in Delaware, accused Owens of publishing "falsehoods", including that Brigitte was born male under the name Jean-Michel Trogneux. The French president and first lady are willing to travel to Delaware to appear in person for the trial, their lawyer, Clare, told the FT last month.

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