



EIP Mid-Week Report

October 31 – November 2, 2022

This report was created by analysts from the [Election Integrity Partnership](#) (EIP), a non-partisan coalition to empower the research community, election officials, government agencies, civil society organizations, social media platforms, and others to defend our elections against those who seek to undermine them by exploiting weaknesses in the online information environment. **Leading up to Election Day, November 8, we will be producing reports every few days.**

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Recently Published Research

[Rumors, Conspiracy Theories, and Unsubstantiated Claims About Voting: What to Expect on and After Election Day 2022](#)

- The EIP looks back on some of our “What to Expect” predictions from the 2020 elections, as well as **new voting-related narratives we anticipate to take shape heading into Election Day 2022**, on Election Day, and in the days that will follow.
- **Many rumors about Election Day will surface in the weeks after the election**, particularly in cases where uncertainty around election results has been extended by a close result, recount, litigation, or a candidate’s refusal to concede.
- As in 2020, **rumors, conspiracy theories, and misleading narratives about the 2022 U.S. midterm election are following a familiar progression**: Interested parties gathering “evidence,” delegitimizing results, and calling for action.
- **One big difference this time around**: Election fraud narratives are now deeply familiar to audiences that had only a passing familiarity with them two years ago.
- [Read more here.](#)

[Election Vulnerability Disclosure Becomes Fodder for Dueling Conspiratorial Narratives on Telegram](#)

- University of Michigan computer science professor **J. Alex Halderman recently published an analysis where he identified a flaw in Dominion Voting Systems** ballot scanners, a vulnerability that didn’t allow ballots or vote tallies to be modified but could, in some situations, compromise voter privacy.
- Online narratives around this vulnerability show how **different communities — even those that seemingly share partisan goals — can take the same phenomenon and create opposing narratives around it**, fitting the story to the anxieties and concerns of each respective subgroup.
- **In this EIP analysis, we analyze the spread of associated narratives across multiple platforms**, including Twitter and Telegram. We explore one *counter-narrative* that doubts the flaw’s seriousness, instead claiming that Halderman’s disclosure is part of a larger plan to prevent citizen oversight of the election process.
- [Read more here.](#)

[Assessing Inauthentic Networks Commenting on the U.S. Midterms](#)

- As we have observed with other foreign influence operations targeting American politics over the last five years, **motivations appear to include amplifying strong views on polarizing issues in American politics.**

- “Follow-back” or “follow train” behaviors were present in these datasets, targeting both right-leaning and left-leaning activist online factions. These follow-for-follow efforts may enable inauthentic actors to integrate themselves into highly-active communities that regularly amplify ideologically-aligned political messaging from fellow participants.
- **One of the three China-linked networks consisted primarily of right-wing accounts that echoed talking points related to the “Big Lie,”** such as references to “2000 Mules” and “stolen election”, while another had left-wing personas that talked extensively about gun control. As analysts have observed in prior China-linked influence operations, content supportive of China’s policies was present, though there was also some content critical of China.
- [Read more here.](#)

Noteworthy Incidents & Rumors

1. Claim that Los Angeles County audit revealed 39% of removed recall ballots were valid

Users across several social media platforms have cited a months-old news story about an audit of the Los Angeles County District Attorney recall as “proof” of Democratic voter fraud. In August 2022, officials announced that the movement to recall District Attorney George Gascón had not accrued enough valid signatures for the measure to appear on the ballot. The measure needed 566,857 signatures to pass, however the county announced that [only 520,000](#) of the almost 715,000 signatures submitted were valid. The L.A. County Registrar’s Office said that removals were due to either duplicate submissions or signatures from individuals not registered to vote.

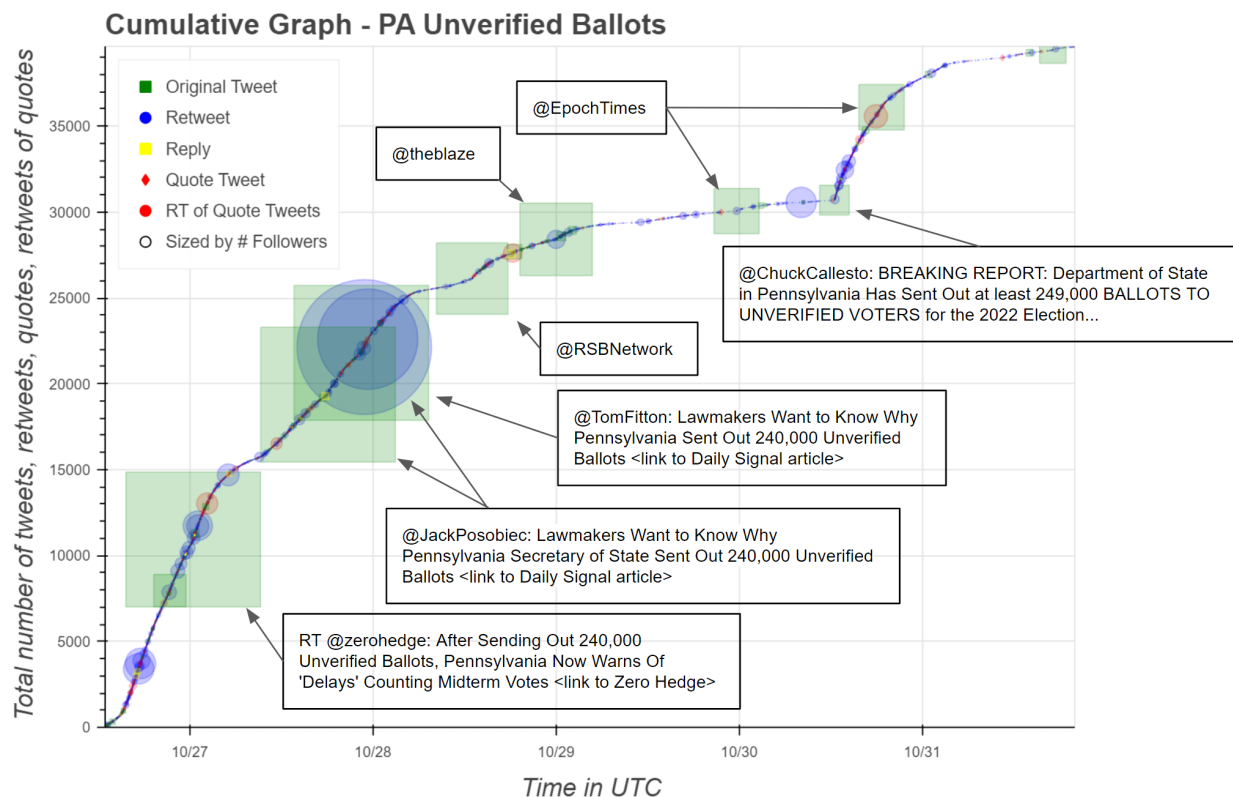
The issue resurfaced on October 21 when an article from the conservative news outlet *Washington Examiner* claimed that volunteers found over 1,500 of the discarded signatures were actually valid, culminating in a lawsuit to accelerate the review of all rejected signatures.

Alongside this article came a new wave of social media posts claiming the discrepancy was proof of voter fraud, particularly voter fraud conducted by Democrats. Some posts misrepresented the lawsuit as referring to rejected ballots instead of rejected signatures, casting suspicion on the upcoming midterm elections. A similar narrative [was debunked](#) in August after it was spread by conservative influencers such as Donald Trump Jr.

Monitoring of this incident from Thursday, October 27 through Monday, October 31 in both English and Spanish language communities found little engagement with the topic in Spanish, with some discussion in English. We have also seen this narrative spread on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Truth Social, however the majority of posts received low engagement.

2. Claim and that Democrats in Pennsylvania mailed out 240,000 ballots to unverified voters

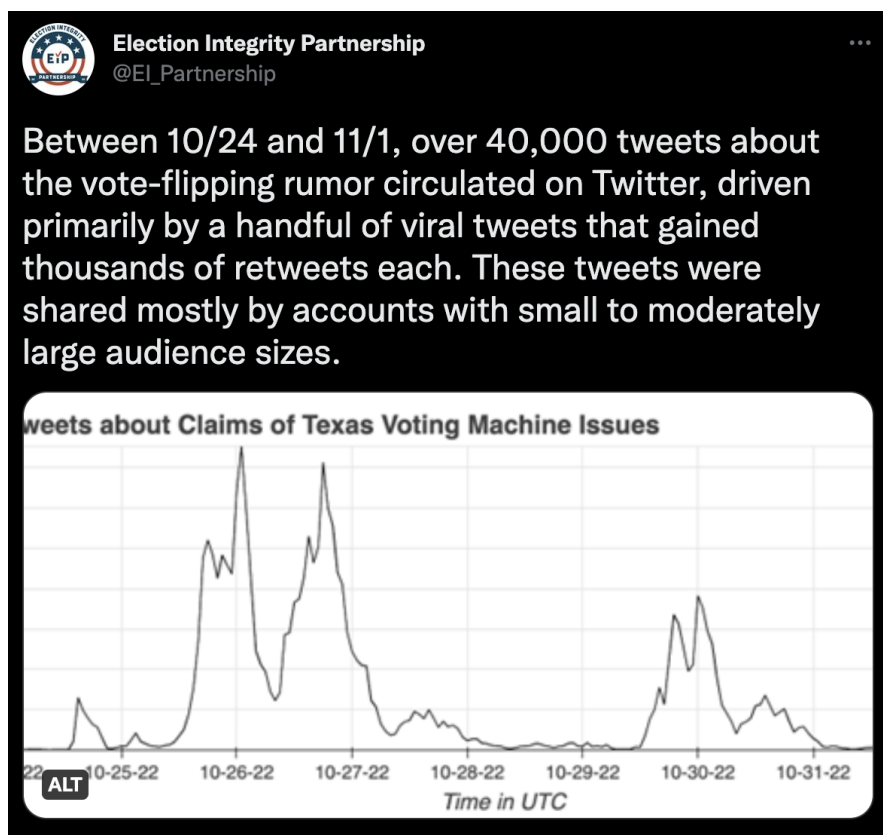
- On October 31, the EIP we examined another false rumor based on a misinterpretation of data surrounding voter verification in Pennsylvania. The rumor emerged due to misleading framing of data provided by Pennsylvania’s Department of State.
- In a letter amplified on multiple social media platforms including Twitter and Telegram, Republican lawmakers claim that “240,000 ballots are ‘NOT VERIFIED’” and therefore “must be set aside and not counted.”
- [According to an Associated Press fact check](#), the “not verified” status does not mean that voters failed to provide correct identification or weren’t ultimately verified. Instead, the label is an internal workflow status to ensure counties properly verify IDs.
- On Twitter, the rumor’s spread coincided with the release of the lawmakers’ letter and subsequent amplification by different high- and low- follower accounts. Despite fact checks by Reuters and the Associated Press, the letter and related misleading claims have continued to be amplified.



- As can be seen in the graph, most of the language from the influential accounts is fairly neutral, functioning primarily to raise questions of doubt around Pennsylvania’s election processes.
- [The EIP published a tweet thread analyzing the spread of rumors associated with the voter verification claim.](#)

3. Voting machine errors “switched votes” in Texas

- There have been several viral tweets over the past week claiming that voting machines in Texas are “switching” a voter's choice. This has been blamed on various causes including the “calibration” of the machines and intentional switching from the opposition party.
- [Coverage from the Texas Tribune](#) highlighted that there is no evidence of vote-switching by voting equipment. Instead, election officials and technology providers suggest that perceptions of switching are likely due to user error when pressing touch screens.



- Many tweets about this rumor were either framed as “friend of a friend” posts, first-hand experience, or second-hand anecdotes. Sharing personal or close friend anecdotes is a common rhetorical technique in the spread of election misinformation, [as the EIP analyzed in 2020](#).
- Tweets utilizing this framing are particularly likely to spread, as this form of anecdotal evidence appears to come from ordinary people not working in service of an agenda.
- [The EIP published a tweet thread](#) exploring these rumors on November 1.

4. Claim that Democratic cities take longer to count their votes than the rest of the country

Claims on Facebook and Twitter emerged around Democrat-led cities “taking longer” to count votes than Republican-led cities. The conversation arose in reaction to comments from Acting Pennsylvania Secretary of the Commonwealth Leigh Chapman on Chuck Todd’s Meet the Press NOW that election results will not be available on election night. Chapman highlighted that delays in results were likely due to state laws that ban election officials from counting absentee and mail-in ballots until 7 a.m. on Election Day. The acting secretary also said that the state had already received about half of the 1.3 million absentee and mail-in ballots requested in Pennsylvania. On October 30, Chapman also [wrote an op-ed for *The Inquirer*](#) expanding on why counting will take longer than just Election Day, pointing out that this did not mean anything nefarious was happening.

Social media conversation, including comments from [Ted Cruz on Twitter](#), questioned why “only” Democrat cities take several days to count their votes when the rest of the country “gets it done on election night.” We anticipate this narrative around “delays” in counting to be common in the coming week, especially as different election laws state-by-state mean that some election results will be known more quickly than others. [The familiarity of this long-established trope](#) makes such arguments compelling to audiences, even if they are not substantiated.

How to Connect With the EIP

To speak with EIP researchers about this work or other research, email info@eipartnership.net.

