



# EIP Weekly Report

October 17-22, 2022

This report was created by analysts from the [Election Integrity Partnership](#), 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.

## In This Briefing:

<b>Recently Published Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ <a href="#">Confusion Over Election Technology Contributes to Rumors and False Claims</a></li><li>→ <a href="#">Implying Intentionality: Understanding Unsubstantiated Allegations Around Election Administration Mistakes</a></li></ul>
<b>Noteworthy Incidents &amp; Rumors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Research into Dominion Voting Systems software flaw amplified and recontextualized within election fraud narratives</li><li>→ Registration error in Arizona affects up to 6,000 voters</li><li>→ Confusion around postage required for absentee ballots in Ohio</li></ul>

## Recently Published Research

The [EIP regularly publishes blog posts on our website](#) that take a deeper dive into election-related rumors. In this report we highlight two recent publications: an analysis of how confusion over election technology contributes to the spread of misleading claims of election fraud, and another exploring online conversation surrounding two cases of election administration mistakes in Arizona and Colorado. Click the titles below to read more. If you're a journalist looking to speak with EIP researchers, please contact Michael Grass ([megrass@uw.edu](mailto:megrass@uw.edu)) at the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public or send a message to [info@eipartnership.net](mailto:info@eipartnership.net)

### [Confusion Over Election Technology Contributes to Rumors and False Claims](#)

- **Stories about breaches of election technology present challenges to readers**, who process information about breaches through the lens of electoral impact, often without sufficient context.
- **We observed this in discourse associated with a recent incident in Kent County, Michigan**, in which a poll worker was arrested for allegedly tampering with an electronic poll book. While the technology breached had no connection to election results, people who commented on the story online interpreted it as an instance of election fraud or cheating.
- **This is not the only instance in which this has occurred**, highlighting areas for improvement among journalistic outlets and misinformation analysts writing about specific election technologies .
- [Read more here.](#)

### [Implying Intentionality: Understanding Unsubstantiated Allegations Around Election Administration Mistakes](#)

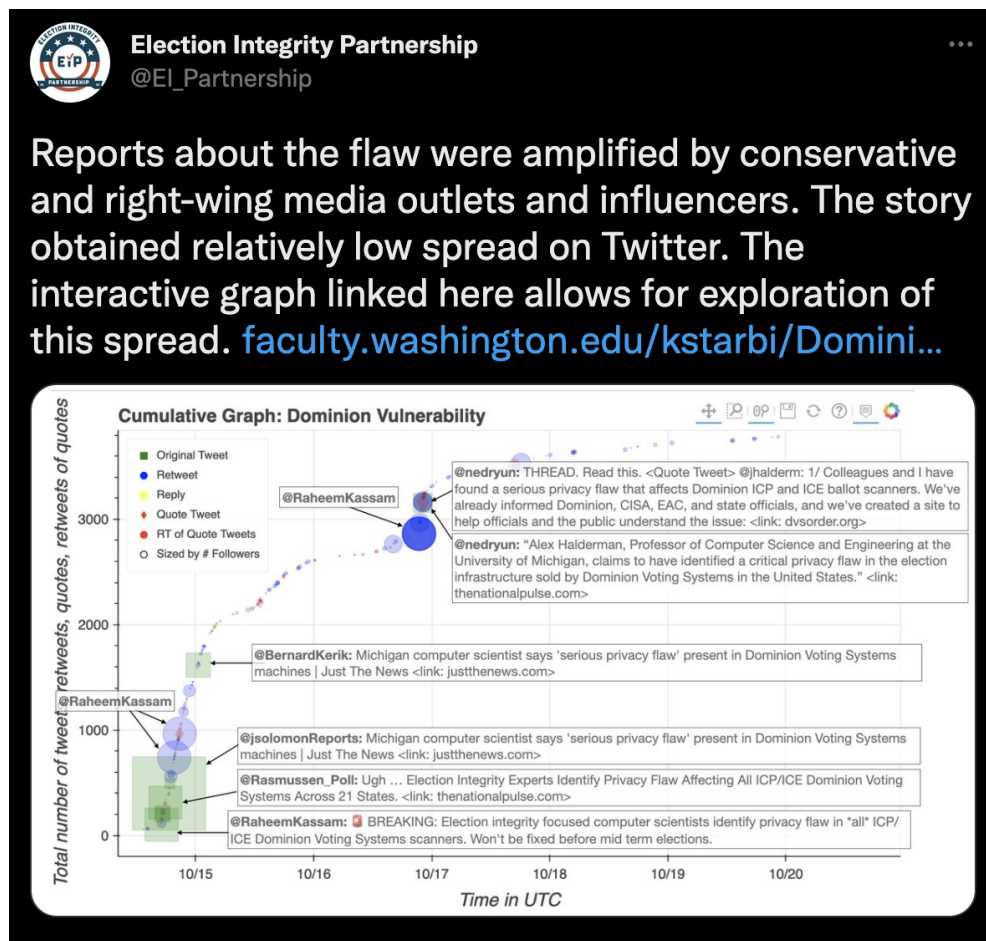
- **When errors in election procedures and materials surface**, either by election officials via official statements or by voters who discover the errors, online discussion often includes speculative rumors of intentionality.
- **In this Election Integrity Partnership (EIP) analysis, we look at two case studies, in Colorado and Arizona**, where mistakes and errors in election administration have led to unsubstantiated allegations of intentionality — which then spread rapidly online.
- **Tactics that facilitate this spread are often designed to invite engagement** — and are difficult to moderate.
- **Election officials should strive to be rapid and transparent in reporting mistakes**, and provide sufficient context to mitigate the spread of false rumors and disinformation.
- [Read more here.](#)

# Noteworthy Incidents & Rumors

The EIP team identifies and analyzes the spread of rumors that suppress voting, reduce participation, confuse voters about election processes, delegitimize election results, or threaten election workers. In the weeks leading up to and following Election Day in November, we're highlighting several viral incidents that our team believes are noteworthy.

## 1. Research into Dominion Voting Systems software flaw amplified and recontextualized within election fraud narratives

- On October 14, University of Michigan professor J. Alex Halderman reported a software flaw affecting some Dominion ballot scanners. This flaw wouldn't allow ballots or vote tallies to be modified, but could compromise voter privacy.



- Discourse regarding the flaw had higher relative engagement on Telegram, where it split into two competing narratives. The first, and larger, narrative focused on the flaw itself, implying that the discovery of the flaw cast a larger doubt on Dominion's machines.
- The second narrative began to develop a few hours after the initial spread. This narrative framed the flaw as part of a manufactured crisis to prevent oversight of the election.
- [The EIP published a tweet thread on October 20 analyzing the spread of the two narratives](#). We plan to release a deeper analysis of this incident in the coming days, and will append additional data analysis to this thread over time.

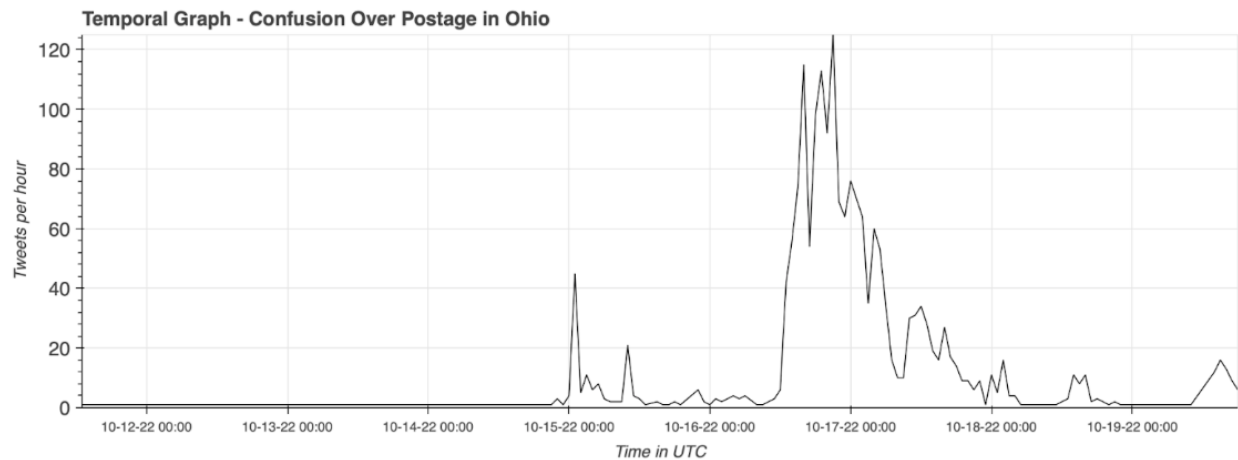
## 2. Registration error in Arizona affects up to 6,000 voters

On October 18, Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs highlighted a voter registration error that may have resulted in up to 1,000 voters receiving ballots without local races. Hobbs' office found that "a quarter of one percent of voters," up to 6,000 voters, were registered wrongly as "federal only" voters instead of "full ballot" voters due to a problem with a link between voter registration and driver's license databases. [Citizens registering to vote in Arizona must provide valid proof of citizenship](#) in order to be eligible to vote a "full ballot" in all federal, state, county and local elections. Voters who do not submit proof of citizenship with their voter registration form are known as "federal only" voters. Approximately 1,000 of the affected 6,000 voters received mail ballots without local races, but it's unclear yet how many of those 1,000 people wrongly received that type of ballot.

The error resulted in criticism of Hobbs and the Secretary of State's office, [linking the mistake to previous election administration issues in the state](#). The discourse around the incident from claims of incompetence on Hobbs' part along with calls for her to resign as Secretary of State, to claims that this is evidence of election fraud and "cheating." Further, the intricacies involved in the incident, such as the differences between "full ballot" and "federal only" voters, and the differing numbers attached to the story, led to misleading claims around the number of voters impacted by the database error.

## 3. Confusion around postage required for absentee ballots in Ohio

Confusion around the postage needed to mail absentee ballots in Ohio spread on Twitter earlier this week. [According to a 2020 fact check](#), the amount of postage required differs on a county-by-county basis depending on the number of candidates and issues, which can lead to ballots of differing lengths. All absentee ballots in Ohio contain information on the exact cent amount needed to return the ballot through the U.S. Postal Service. Conversation around the issue appears to be a case of confusion and unintentionally misleading information about the need for all absentee voters to use two stamps. While the cross platform spread of the conversation was overall limited, similar narratives of confusion have arisen in Alaska and Oklahoma. [Fact checking on the stories by AFP confirms that the USPS will deliver absentee ballots even if they have insufficient postage](#).



The temporal graph above highlights how conversation peaked on Twitter. In tracking the Ohio postage rumor on Twitter, we find the spread is characteristic of cases tied to misunderstandings and confusion. The initial pickup is often highlighted by a mid-level influencer early on, which allows the rumor to extend beyond the initial community discussing the incident to reach a wider audience. In this case, a single tweet from a mid-level influencer on the issue had twenty times as many likes as any related tweets. Likely given the existence of 2020 fact checks and debunking from other users, we then see the rumor lose steam before it is able to reach any mega-influencers. Though we can't say for sure what the impact of these interventions were in this case, early action on similar cases can at times mitigate further confusion.

## How to Connect With the EIP

Thank you for subscribing to the Election Integrity Partnership newsletter! Every week we compile narratives and articles from the previous week. To speak with EIP researchers about this work or other researchers, email [info@eipartnership.net](mailto:info@eipartnership.net).

