MUSK'S POLITICAL POSTS

How Elon Musk's political posts amass more views than all U.S. political campaign ads on X's disclosure dataset

Table of Contents

Musk's political posts amass 17.1bn views – more than all political campaign ads on X

Elon Musk's political posts have amassed 17.1 billion views since he endorsed Donald Trump in July – over 2 times as many views as all the US "political campaigning ads" that X has recorded in its political ads disclosure dataset in the same period.[i]

The Center for Countering Digital Hate studied Musk's posts and compared them to ads released as part of X's US political campaigning ads disclosure dataset. The Center estimates it would cost a political campaign $24 million to run ads reaching as many views as Musk's posts did.

At least 87 of Musk's posts this year have promoted claims about the US elections that fact-checkers have rated as false or misleading, amassing 2 billion views. None of these posts featured a Community Note, X's name for user-generated fact-checks.

<u>Musk's political posts have amassed 17.1 billion views since he endorsed Trump</u>

Elon Musk's posts containing terms to do with politics and the US elections have amassed a total of 17.1 billion views on X since the billionaire publicly endorsed Trump on July 13th.

Musk reportedly started donating tens of millions of dollars to Republican groups starting in 2022, but since endorsing Trump in July he has become the biggest donor to the former president's campaign.[ii] At the same time, Musk's posts on X expressing support for Trump or criticism of his Democrat opponent Kamala Harris have stepped up significantly.

Researchers identified a total of 746 posts from Musk made between July 13 and October 25 that mention terms associated with the US elections, such as "Donald Trump", "Kamala Harris", "voting" and "ballots". Posts in which Musk quoted other posts mentioning political terms were included, but reposts were not.[iii] The posts have a total of 17.1 billion views.

A recent study from the Wall Street Journal looking at posts recommended to X users with interests in non-political topics showed that Musk's posts appeared at the top of their feeds more frequently than any other user's.[iv]

It was previously reported that under the direction of Musk, engineers at X "built a system designed to ensure that Musk — and Musk alone — benefits from previously unheard-of promotion of his tweets to the entire user base."[v]

Musk's posts received over twice the views as all political campaigning ads on X

Analysis of the US political campaigning ads disclosure dataset published by X shows that these ads amassed 7.7 billion views in the period since Musk's endorsement of Trump.

It means that Musk's own political posts received twice as many views as all political campaigning ads in the period studied.

Researchers analyzed all US political campaigning ads from X's dataset that were live at any point between July 13 and October 25. Where ads started running before July 13, we calculated the ads' daily average views and used this to estimate how many views they accumulated on the days they were live during the period of our study.

Political campaigns would have to pay $24 million to get as many views as Musk's posts

Analysis of X's US political campaigning ads disclosure dataset shows that all the US political campaigning ads run between July 13 and October 25 cost $10.7m in total.

This allows us to arrive at an average for how much ads cost per 1,000 views, an ad industry measure referred to as "cost per mille" or "CPM", equal to $1.39 per 1,000 views.

Applying this average cost of US political campaigning ads to Musk's own political posts in the same period, we can estimate that his posts would have cost $24 million if they had been run as ads promoted to users on his platform.

Musk's misleading claims about the elections received 2 billion views

Researchers identified 87 X posts from Elon Musk promoting false or misleading claims about the presidential election between January 1 and October 23, with 2 billion views.[vi]

None of the posts displayed a Community Note, X's name for user-generated fact-checks that Musk claims are "a clear and immediate way to refute anything false" posted to X.[vii]

Examples of Musk's false or misleading posts include:[viii]

- "Triple digit increases of illegals in swing states over the past 4 years. Voter importation at an unprecedented scale!" (21m views)[ix]
- "If the Democratic Party big government machine wins this election, they will ban voter ID nationwide, not just in California" (11.9m views)[x]

<u>Musk claims that Democrats are "importing voters" viewed nearly 1.3bn times</u>

Musk has continued to post an additional 66 false or misleading claims about the Democrats "importing voters", amassing nearly 1.3 billion views.

Musk continues to promote the claim that Democrats are tolerating or encouraging illegal migration with the aim of having them vote in forthcoming elections. Examples include:

- "They [Democrats] are importing voters. It is obvious." (47.2m views)[xi]
- "The Dem administrative state is flying millions of future voters directly into swing states. […] Given that this is a sure path to permanent one-party rule, it is a very smart strategy." (35.2m views)[xii]
- " Massive voter importation to make swing states permanently blue and turn America into a one-party state." (15.4m views)[xiii]

Fact checkers say Musk is wrong to claim that Democrats are 'recruiting' immigrants to build a majority for their party, both because it takes years for immigrants to become US citizens with voting rights and because there is no guarantee who they would vote for.[xiv] Noncitizens who vote also risk deportation or incarceration.[xv]
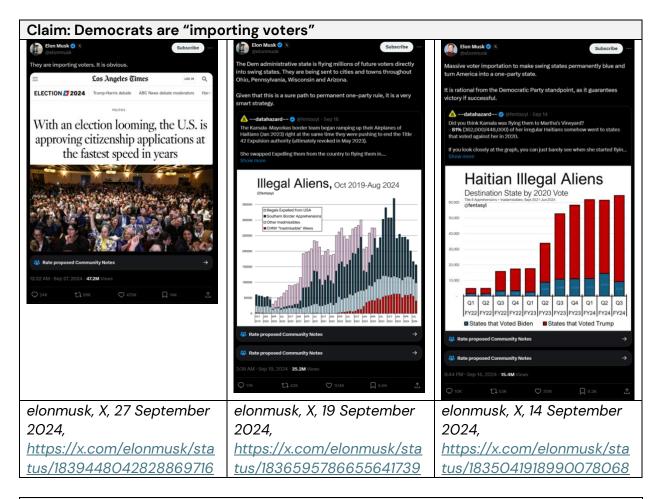
<u>Musk continues to push claims about unreliable voting systems viewed 532m times</u>
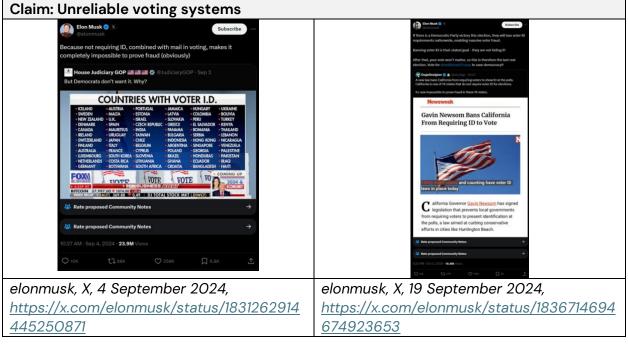
Musk has posted 19 posts promoting false or misleading claims about the integrity of voting amassing nearly 532 million views, continuing to criticize mail–in ballots and electronic voting machines. Examples include:[xvi]

- "Because not requiring ID, combined with mail in voting, makes it completely impossible to prove fraud (obviously)" (23.9m views)[xvii]
- "If there is a Democratic Party victory this election, they will ban voter ID requirements nationwide, enabling massive voter fraud." (15.4m views)[xviii]

Fact checkers say that voter fraud related to ballots sent by mail or placed in drop boxes is extremely rare. Experts say that mail ballots are verified when being requested by a voter and verified again when returning a ballot.[xix]

36 states require voters to show some form of ID at the polls, while the remaining 14 states "use other methods to verify the identify of voters", such as checking a signature against information on file – all voters are subject to perjury charges if they vote under false pretenses.[xx]

Claim: Democrats are "importing voters"

elonmusk, X, 27 September 2024,
https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1839448042828869716

elonmusk, X, 19 September 2024,
https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1836595786655641739

elonmusk, X, 14 September 2024,
https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1835041918990078068

Claim: Unreliable voting systems

elonmusk, X, 4 September 2024,
https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1831262914445250871

elonmusk, X, 19 September 2024,
https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1836714694674923653

Other misleading claims	
elonmusk, X, 21 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1848181149840871866	*elonmusk, X, 21 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/184813882479657396O*

Methodology

This section explains how we identified Elon Musk's posts about elections, analyzed political campaigning ads run on X in the same period and how we estimated the average cost of these ads.

How we identified Elon Musk's posts about elections

Researchers applied the following regular expression query to the text content of Elon Musk's posts made between his endorsement of Donald Trump for president on July 13 and October 25, 2024, the latest date for which we have comparable data on ads.

> (dem|democrat)|republican|trump|donald|kamala|harris|biden|vance|vote|ballot|elect
> ronic|save
> act|drop(|\s)box|poll|@(realDonaldTrump|america|KamalaHarris|JDVance|POTUS|Joe
> Biden|Tim_Walz|VP|TrumpWarRoom|DNC|theamericapac|TheDemocrats|GOPconven
> tion|harris_wins|KamalaHQ)

The query is designed to identify posts featuring words relevant to the US election, such as "Donald Trump", "Kamala Harris", "voting" and "election". It is also designed to include posts referring to X usernames associated with Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, their campaigns and their political parties.

Posts in which Musk quoted a post from another user were included if the quoted post matched terms in our query. Musk's reposts (formerly known as retweets) of other users' posts without his own commentary were not included.

Researchers then carried out manual checks on the dataset aimed at excluding posts that were not about the US elections, for example posts about political events in Brazil.

This resulted in a final dataset of Elon Musk's political posts containing 746 posts in total with 17,126,370,050 views.

How we analyzed US political campaigning ads in the same period

Researchers downloaded X's most recent US political campaigning ads disclosure dated October 25, 2024.[xxi] The dataset includes the names of advertisers, links to ads, start and end dates for ads, views and cost in dollars. X states that the dataset contains "US Political Campaigning Ads" only, with X defining "political campaigning ads" as follows:

- Ads that advocate for or against, appeal directly for votes, or solicit financial support for:
    - a candidate or political party.
    - an election, legislation, referendum, or ballot measure.
- Ads from registered PACs and SuperPACs.[xxii]

Researchers filtered the set to only those ads that were live at any point between July 13 and October 25, inclusive. Where an ad started running before July 13 and continued to run into the period studied, we calculated its daily average views and cost, multiplying this by the number of days it was live in the study period.

This allowed us to estimate the total views and cost of ads in the dataset for the period from July 13 to October 25, 2024 inclusive. This final ads dataset contained 40,683 ads with 7,700,580,400 views and a total cost of $10,688,269.

How we estimated the average cost per 1,000 views for ads in our dataset

To arrive at an average cost per view for ads in our dataset, we divided the total cost of the ads in the period studied by their total number of views in the same period.

We then multiplied this value by 1,000 to arrive at a cost of $1.39 per 1,000 views, an ads industry measure known as "cost per mille" or "CPM".

This allowed us to estimate how much it would have cost a political campaign to reach as many views as Musk's political posts in the study period, amounting to $23,771,098,485.

X's ads dataset does not state whether particular ads were targeting and paying for performance according to an impressions metric, or for performance against other metrics such as engagement or clicks. Our CPM figure should therefore be interpreted as a general estimate of the relationship between ad cost and impressions, regardless of whether ads were targeting impressions.

End notes

[i] X defines "political campaigning ads" as follows:
- Ads that advocate for or against, appeal directly for votes, or solicit financial support for:
  o a candidate or political party.
  o an election, legislation, referendum, or ballot measure.
- Ads from registered PACs and SuperPACs.

"Political content", X, retrieved 31 October 2024, https://business.x.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/political-content

[ii] "Elon Musk Gave Tens of Millions to Republican Causes Far Earlier Than Previously Known", Wall Street Journal, 2 October 2024, https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/elon-musk-political-donations-stephen-miller-desantis-39464294

[iii] See our full methodology at the end of this document for further details.

[iv] " X Algorithm Feeds Users Political Content—Whether They Want It or Not", Wall Street Journal, 29 October 2024, https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/x-twitter-political-content-election-2024-28f2dadd

[v] "Yes, Elon Musk created a special system for showing you all his tweets first", The Verge, 15 February 2023, https://www.theverge.com/2023/2/14/23600358/elon-musk-tweets-algorithm-changes-twitter

[vi] The 89 posts received a combined total of 2,097,003,900 views.

[vii] Elon Musk, X, 6 August 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1820783473021391073

[viii] Elon Musk, X, 21 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1848181149840871866
Elon Musk, X, 21 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1848138824796573960
Elon Musk, X, 9 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1832968811890237947

[ix] Elon Musk, X, 21 October 2024, https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1848181149840871866

[x] Elon Musk, X, 21 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1848138824796573960

[xi] Elon Musk, X, 27 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1839448042828869716

[xii] Elon Musk, X, 19 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1836595786655641739

[xiii] Elon Musk, X, 14 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1835041918990078068

[xiv] "Elon Musk is wrong to say Joe Biden is recruiting immigrants to create a Democratic majority", Poynter, 8 February 2024, https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2024/elon-musk-is-wrong-to-say-joe-biden-is-recruiting-immigrants-to-create-a-democratic-majority/

[xv] "Fact check: Elon Musk's claim that Democrats are avoiding deportations to win elections is False", PolitiFact, 6 March 2024, https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2024/mar/06/elon-musk-fact-check-elon-musks-claim-that-democrats-are-avo/

[xvi] Elon Musk, X, 4 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1831262914445250871
Elon Musk, X, 5 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1842601913440997846

[xvii] Elon Musk, X, 4 September 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1831262914445250871

[xviii] Elon Musk, X, 5 October 2024, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1842601913440997846

[xix] "How big is the risk of voter fraud in US elections?", DW, 7 July 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/fears-of-fraud-illegal-votes-voter-id-electronic-voting-absentee-ballots/a-69570625

[xx] "How big is the risk of voter fraud in US elections?", DW, 7 July 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/fears-of-fraud-illegal-votes-voter-id-electronic-voting-absentee-ballots/a-69570625

[xxi] X states that its political ads disclosure "will be updated every 2 business days", but as of October 31, 2024 the available dataset is dated October 25. The dataset was taken from the following page.
"Political Ads Disclosure", X, retrieved 31 October 2024, https://business.x.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/political-content/political-ads-disclosure

[xxii] "Political Content", X, retrieved 31 October 2024, https://business.x.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/political-content