

# Elon Musk used his satellites to steal US election

Social media used to spread false accusations that Starlink helped manipulate result



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Elon Musk has become a close ally of Donald Trump Credit: JIM WATSON/AFP

Left-wing conspiracy theorists have claimed the 2024 US presidential election was “stolen”, as posts falsely alleging Elon Musk’s Starlink satellite network was used to manipulate the result spread on social media. Claims that 20m votes in the election have “disappeared” or that Starlink was used to interfere with vote-counting machines have been shared by thousands of people across X, Threads and TikTok.

A nine-minute video claiming states had used “Starlink in order to tally up or count ballots” had more than 100,000 likes, 55,000 shares and had been viewed almost 900,000 times on TikTok. The video falsely claimed: “This is why the numbers don’t make sense.”

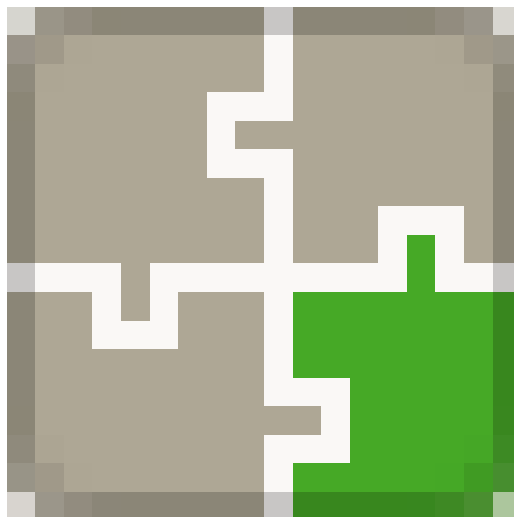
Similar claims that Mr Musk, a Trump ally, may have used Starlink to tamper with the election have spread widely across Threads, the social network owned by Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta, as well as on X, which is owned by Mr Musk and was previously known as Twitter.

On Threads, one post with more than 42,000 views and 840 shares claimed Mr Musk “knew who won four hours earlier than we did”.

It alleged Starlink had been “exploding” communications satellites, with Mr Musk “destroying the evidence”. Another lengthy post with more than

370,000 views and 6,300 shares claimed that voting had been hacked “at the tabulation level”.

Hashtags such as “TrumpCheated” have been shared across Threads and X, while calls for recounts have been shared with the phrase “SwingStateHandRecount”.



There is no evidence to support the claims spreading on social media. US voting machines are typically disconnected from the internet in order to prevent interference.

Last week Jen Easterly, director of the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, said there was “no evidence of any malicious activity that had a material impact on the security or integrity of our election infrastructure”.

Allegations that there are millions of “missing” votes have been spread by both Democrats unhappy about Trump’s victory and Republicans who claimed the theories vindicate their concerns about the 2020 result.

The discrepancy in the number of votes cast is mostly down to slow vote counting in California, which as of Monday had only processed around 74pc of ballots despite being called for Kamala Harris days ago.

Some social media posts spreading the conspiracy claims have been accompanied by fact-checks debunking the claim, such as a post on X that had repeated the Starlink claims.

On Friday, disinformation analysts at NewsGuard reported that in the hours after it became apparent that Mr Trump had won “Left-leaning social media users claimed that the apparent momentum behind Kamala Harris before the election made it impossible for her to lose, so the only explanation was widespread fraud.”

Alex Stamos, chief information security officer at SentinelOne and a former executive at Facebook, said in a post on Threads: “This election was not stolen. Neither was 2020.

“We warned about this exact potential outcome in 2020: the losing side of every subsequent election rejecting the results.”

The hashtag #DoNotConcedeKamala received 30,300 mentions over the course of eight hours on Nov 6, according to NewsGuard.

The hashtag #DoNotConcedeKamala received 30,300 mentions over the course of eight hours on Nov 6 Credit: Hannah McKay/REUTERS

Analysts at Cyabra, an Israeli start-up that tracks disinformation campaigns, said the surge in these posts was initially driven by a network of fake accounts, before being picked up by real online influencers.

Cyabra found that 270 apparently fake X profiles sent more than 2,100 posts including the hashtag, which were viewed around 40m times. After this, genuine Harris supporters began to share the same claims.

“As fake profiles pulled back, real influencers began to amplify the conspiracy, making it appear more organic,” analysts at Cyabra said.

The claims from Ms Harris's supporters that the election has been rigged against them mirror cries of voter fraud propagated by Mr Trump and his followers in the wake of his defeat in 2020.

Groups calling for Americans to "Stop the Steal" in 2020 grew to hundreds of thousands of members on Facebook ahead of the Jan 6 riots on Capitol Hill.

Mr Trump and his allies, including Mr Musk, continued to fuel fears that the 2024 election could be influenced by election fraud, up to and including polling day.

On Nov 5, Mr Trump posted claims on his social network, Truth Social, of "massive CHEATING in Philadelphia". Local election officials insisted there was "absolutely no truth" in the former president's statement.

Some analysts have dubbed the new phenomenon "BlueAnon", after the far-Right conspiracy theory "QAnon" that has found appeal among some Trump supporters.

Grace Rahman, news and online editor at Full Fact, a Meta fact-checking partner, said: "Misinformation about vote counts in the US election is spreading across social media platforms collecting millions of views.

"Fact checkers have debunked a variety of claims so far, including allegations that Kamala Harris won in states that don't require voter ID – which is factually incorrect – and unfounded claims that millions of ballots were 'missing' that emerged before counting had finished.

"Even without evidence, false claims like these can be corrosive to public trust in the US and beyond. We urge everyone to check what they've seen online is accurate and consult trusted sources before sharing."

Threads, TikTok and X were contacted for comment.