2022 Q4 Piyaoba Disinformation Report

(2022/09/16-12/31)

Introduction

Piyaoba is the first centralized fact-checking website to combat right-wing disinformation in the Chinese American community. "Piyaoba" means "let's fact-check it" in Mandarin Chinese.

Launched in early 2022, Piyaoba offers in-language resources and tools to help Chinese Americans dispel misinformation and disinformation effectively, such as real-time alerts, reports, and in-depth fact-checking articles. Readers can also suggest topics for fact-checking.

Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) began our pioneering Chinese Digital Engagement program in 2019 to provide accurate information to the Chinese American community about issues related to social justice. We've created channels on Chinese-language social media (e.g. WeChat), along with the websites JusticePatch.org and piyaoba.org to provide fact-checking and original and curated articles.

Piyaoba expands on our existing fact-checking efforts by systematically researching and documenting the misinformation and disinformation ecosystem within the Chinese American community. Misinformation is false information that someone spreads because they believe it to be true, whereas disinformation is false information that someone knows is false and spreads.

This quarterly report shares the latest features and trends of Chinese-language right-wing misinformation and disinformation. We hope to provide insight and guidance for our subsequent efforts, as well as to give a reference for Chinese-language media, community leaders, and researchers who are concerned about the issues.

This report comprises the following:

- Executive summary, which provides an overview of the scale of Chinese-language mis/disinformation and the methodology and fact-checking efforts from Piyaoba
- A detailed data analysis of the scale, platforms, and topics of Chinese-language disinformation
- Latest features and trends
- Main narratives of Chinese-language disinformation

Executive Summary

Overview of Findings

From September 16, 2022 to December 31, 2022 (Q4), Piyaoba detected and recorded a total of 159 major disinformation articles on Chinese-language social media networks (including WeChat, Chinese Twitter, Chinese YouTube, etc.).

The most frequent topics of Chinese mis/disinformation were:
- Midterm Elections
- COVID-19 and Vaccines
- Attacks on Biden, Democrats and "the left"
- Rumors and Dis/Misinformation about Trump and his allies
- Community Safety: Gun violence and crime
- Social Justice: Gender, Immigration

Among all the dis/misinformation detected by Piyaoba in the fourth quarter of 2022, we found that 44% of the mis/disinformation circulated on WeChat, 46.5% on Twitter, while two other platforms with a large amount of dis/misinformation were Telegram (5%) and YouTube (3.8%).

We monitored a total of 157 active dis/misinformation accounts in Q4, including a total of 54 WeChat public accounts, 47 Chinese-language Twitter accounts, 35 YouTube channels, and 11 Telegram groups/channels. Compared with the previous three quarters, WeChat still has the dominant position but the growing number of users on other platforms also deserves attention.

Trends of disinformation accounts across platforms

In addition to the classification of active accounts spreading inaccurate information summarized in the first three quarters of the report, after ten months of data collection and analysis, we observed some trends in the above accounts.

1. The first thing to note is that new accounts have been found across all platforms. To a certain extent, this can indicate the migration trend of some users, but it does not indicate that the number of accounts spreading fake news has been increasing.

2. Due to WeChat's censorship, some conservative accounts have been suspended. But they were always able to quickly activate alternate accounts and rely on other platforms to attract audiences (such as notifying people on Twitter to follow their alternate accounts). Many have also moved to Telegram to develop new "town squares". Telegram attracts a large audience because of its unique ecology. One advantage is the secrecy of the platform: users do not need to worry about the risk of censorship and information leakage. Another advantage is that Telegram is divided into "groups" and "channels". T It can be said that the Telegram group is more similar to the WeChat group, while the Telegram channel is more similar to the WeChat public account. Running a Telegram group is a common practice for KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders). Obviously, this opportunity to communicate directly with like-minded peers is one of the reasons why Telegram groups have grown in popularity, and KOLs use them to promote their websites.

3. Due to the efforts of YouTube in fighting disinformation, some bloggers spreading anti-vaccine conspiracy theories have been banned. As a result, KOLs have turned to Rumble, a video platform where conservatives gather, but Rumble is after all an emerging platform, less popular than YouTube, and with

a flawed search function (for example, no results are displayed for searching Chinese).

4. Although we monitor far fewer Telegram accounts than YouTube channels, the number of disinformation pieces spread through Telegram is quite high. By comparing KOLs who run both Telegram and YouTube, we found that they are much more active on Telegram than on YouTube. We believe there are several reasons for this: 1) Producing a video on YouTube is more time-consuming than posting on a Telegram; 2) Many Telegram bloggers are able to update content more than once a day (mostly with current affairs commentary), with two to three hundred words a piece, i.e. immediate dissemination is fast and effective (short and easy to read);

Our Methodology

Similar to the previous quarters of 2022, we monitored and counted mis/disinformation the following research methods:

1) Manually monitor and record mis/disinformation related to social justice on WeChat, YouTube, Twitter, and Chinese-language websites; record active accounts; and record keywords to locate Key Opinion Leaders (KOL).
2) Manually search each social media platform using keyword methods.
3) Evaluate the need for fact-checking based on the degree of dissemination, influence, and time sensitivities.
4) Review and cross-check with the English search tool Critical Mention.

For each event, we collected and recorded widely spread dis/misinformation of different versions on different platforms. This change in the recording method aims to assist us in more clearly sorting out the time span and context of the dynamics of widely-spread dis/misinformation, and to assist us in more comprehensively using data as support to understand the spreading characteristics of different platforms.

Our Output

Piyaoba published a total of 18 in-depth fact-checking articles and 29 "disinformation alerts" between September 16, 2022 and December 31, 2022.

Data Analysis

Disinformation Accounts by Platform

The active accounts spreading mis/disinformation in Chinese-language social media in Q4of 2022 remained concentrated on WeChat. In Q3, we detected a total of 157 accounts spreading mis/disinformation, 54 of which were WeChat public accounts

Compared with Q3, the overall percentage of WeChat public accountss decreased from 37% to 34.4%. Chinese-language Twitter accounts (47 accounts, 29.9%) and Chinese-language YouTube channels (35 accounts, 22.3%) increased.
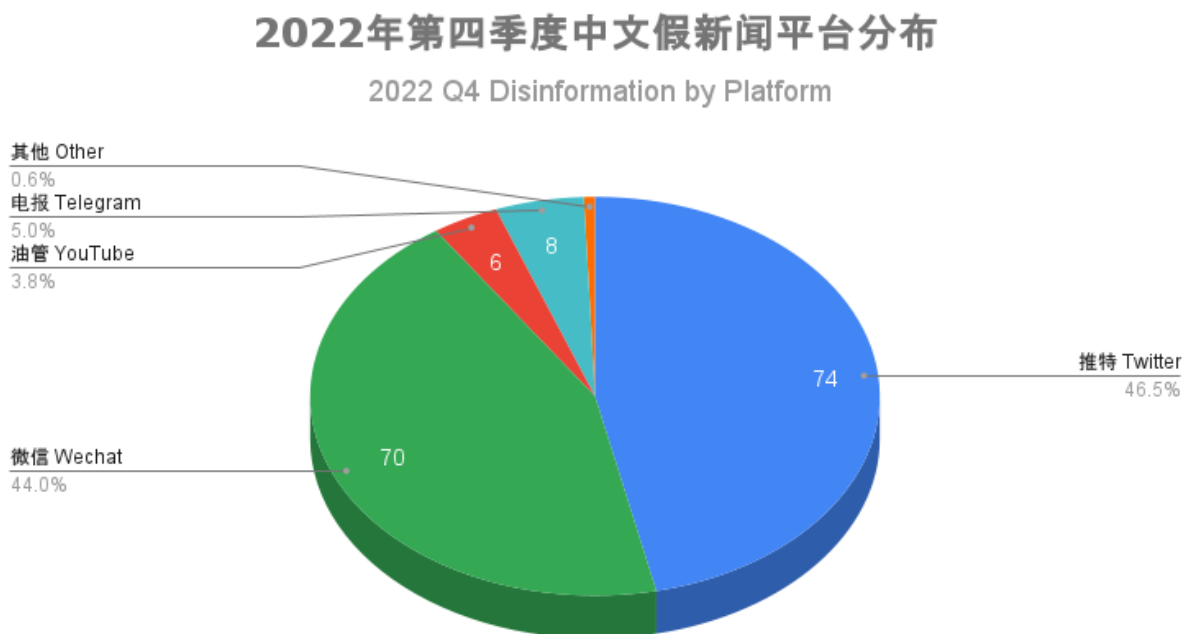

2022年第四季度中文假新闻账号平台分布
2022 Q4 Disinformation Accounts by Platform
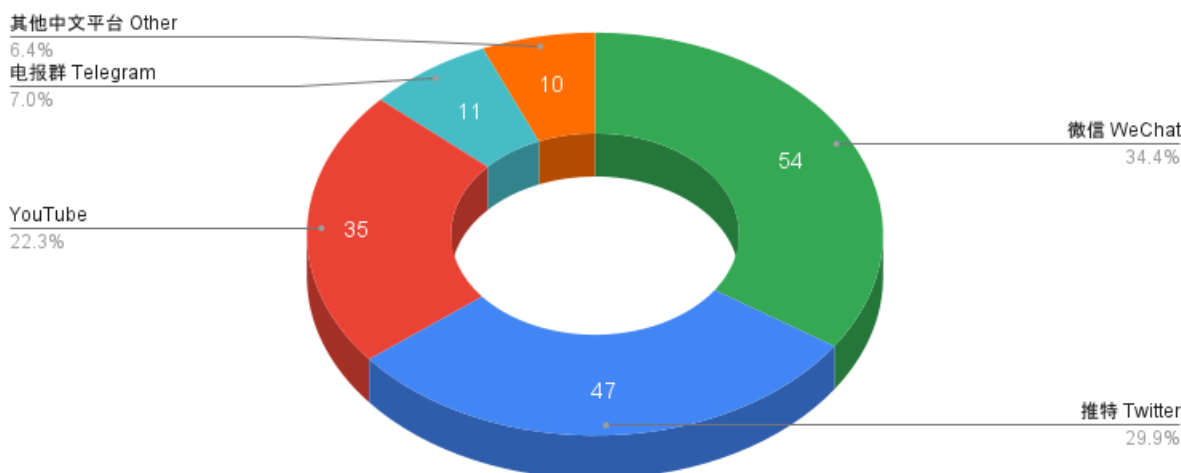
*"微信 WeChat" represents WeChat public accounts. "电报群 Telegram" refers to Telegram group chats of at least 1,000 users. "其他中文平台 Other" includes Weibo accounts and Chinese websites that actively share disinformation focusing on issues within the U.S.
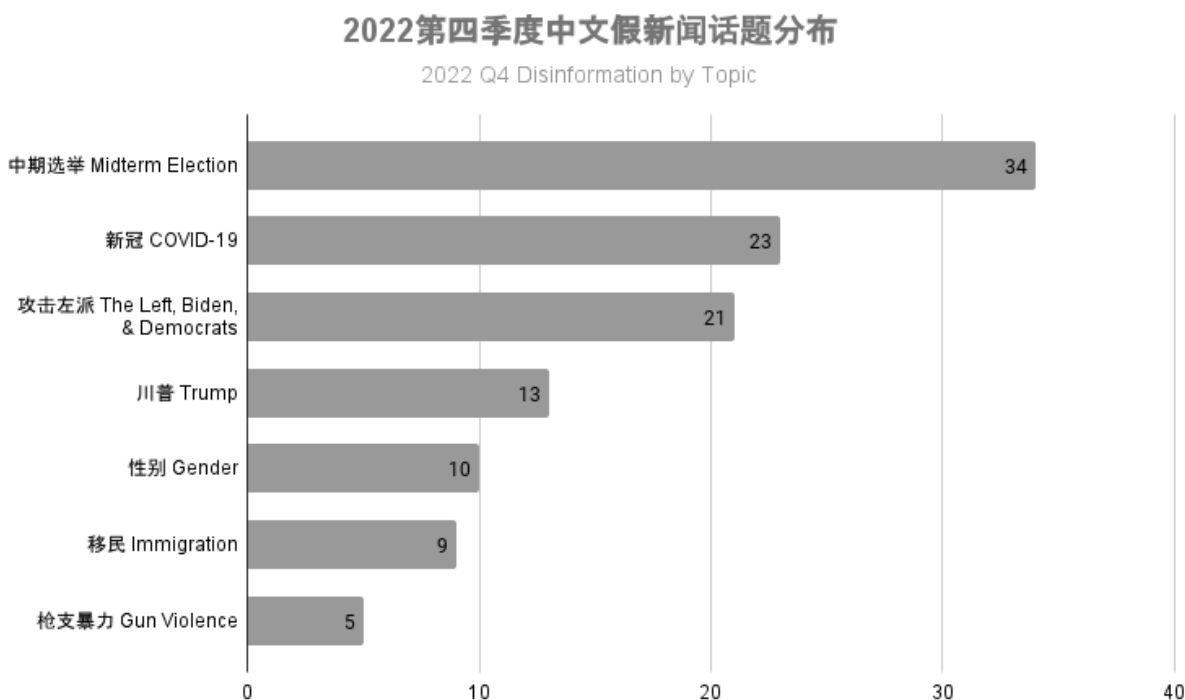
Disinformation by Platform

Of the 159 dis/misinformation pieces we monitored in Q4 , **nearly half came from Twitter (46.5%), followed by Wechat (44%).**

2022年第四季度中文假新闻平台分布

2022 Q4 Disinformation by Platform

其他 Other
0.6%

电报 Telegram
5.0%

油管 YouTube
3.8%

微信 Wechat
44.0%

推特 Twitter
46.5%

74

70

6

8

When highly similar disinformation narratives were detected multiple times on the same platform, we only recorded once. "微信 WeChat" includes: WeChat public accounts, WeChat group message, and individual users' share."其他中文平台 Other" includes disinformation detected on Weibo and other Chinese websites.

Disinformation by Topic

The hottest topics during Q4 were the following: Midterm Elections, COVID-19 and Vaccines, Attacks on Biden, Democrats and "The Left", Other dis/misinformation topics including Trump and his allies, Gun Violence and Crime. There are also two topics under Social Justice: Gender and Immigration.

2022第四季度中文假新闻话题分布

2022 Q4 Disinformation by Topic

Topic	Value
中期选举 Midterm Election	34
新冠 COVID-19	23
攻击左派 The Left, Biden, & Democrats	21
川普 Trump	13
性别 Gender	10
移民 Immigration	9
枪支暴力 Gun Violence	5

Each detected narrative may be placed under more than one topic. For example, a disinformation piece about the Democratic Party's immigration policy would be placed under both "Biden and the Democrats" and "Community Safety".

The topics covered are as follows:

1) Midterm Elections: The right-wing disinformation narrative continues the "election fraud" theory and continues to question the legitimacy of the election during the November 2022 midterm elections.

2) COVID-19: The in-language discussion of COVID-19 continues to spread conspiracy theories about the source of COVID-19, COVID-19 itself, and the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine as a result of the "zero-COVID" policy in mainland China.

3) Biden and the Democratic Party: This type of dis/misinformation has highly overlapped with the topic of "midterm elections". Biden and the Democratic Party are often the targets of this type of dis/misinformation.

4) Trump: Trump himself remains vocal on Truth Social, and many of his posts have become the source of widespread dis/misinformation in the Chinese community.

5) Gender: Gender-related dis/misinformation has been receiving much attention on Chinese-language social media platforms, and those rumors continue to stigmatize sexual minorities.

6) Immigration: Undocumented immigrants are another group that has long been stigmatized in the Chinese media landscape, with dis/misinformation constantly blaming any crime on "undocumented immigrants" and fear mongering many first-generation Chinese immigrants.

7) Gun Violence: The call for pro-gun ownership has been unabated in the Chinese community, with dis/misinformation constantly repeating the claim that gun ownership is what defends democracy and community safety, and using the topic against the Democratic Party.

Special Topic: Twitter

It is worth mentioning that while dis/misinformation related to the midterm elections and COVID-19 "topped the charts" overall, due to Musk's dramatic $44 billion acquisition of Twitter in October 2022 and the ensuing layoffs at Twitter, various rumors related to Twitter and Musk also spread widely on Chinese-language social media platforms in Q4 2022, with two of the most widespead stories on WeChatrelated to Twitter, and a similar pattern was seen on other Chinese platforms, such as YouTube and Twitter.

- After releasing the first part of the Twitter files, Musk said: If someone said I committed suicide, that's not true! (109.3K)
- Boston University revamps deadly COVID-19 strain, claims 80% lethality (94.9k)
- Musk confirms that Twitter did interfere with the 2020 election (59.3k)
- Opposition to Biden is growing by the day, now above 70 percent (40.1k)
- California Releases More Than 7,000 child sexual assault offenders (22.4k)

2022第四季度微信传播最广的不实信息（单位：千次）
2022 Q4 Most Popular Disinformation on WeChat (Thousands) Chinese Version

类别	数值
推特文件与马斯克	109.3
波士顿大学改造致命新冠毒株	94.9
推特干预2020大选	59.3
反拜登民意增高	40.1
加州释放7000多名儿童性侵犯	22.4
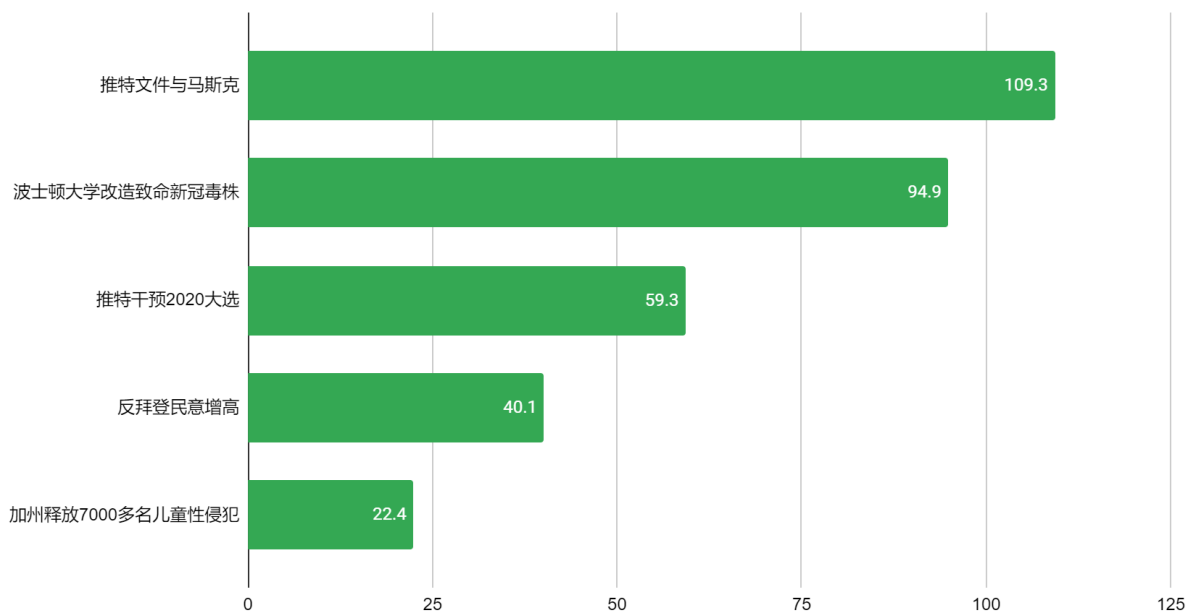
Latest Features & Trends

1. From high expectations for Trump to disappointment over the midterm results - conservatives are not monolithic internally.

In 2022 Q4, Trump has been swamped by lawsuits and the conversation around him remains hot. In late September, Trump was sued by the state of New York over the Trump Group's tax problems; in early December, the Trump Group was deemed to have committed tax fraud; and in late December, the January 6 investigative committee voted to call for judicial recourse against Trump.

As mentioned in previous quarterly reports, the more Trump goes through the judicial investigation, the more Trumpers see it as a "political persecution" by the Democrats. So the more Trump goes through the "ordeal", the more Trumpers will think that Trump is the chosen one to save America (analogous to Jesus going through the ordeal to save the world). It can be said that Trumpers have high hopes for Trump, including constantly reinforcing the impression that "the 2020 election was rigged" and constantly promoting the narrative that Trump will be re-elected president of the United States.

But that narrative cracked after the Republicans suffered a midterm election loss. Republicans expected a "Red Wave", which did not materialize in the midterm elections: the Senate is still the majority of Democrats, while the Republicans have a narrow majority in the House of Representatives. A number of candidates endorsed by Trump suffered losses, and it is worth mentioning that these candidates are hard-core "election deniers" who have been shouting "2020 election fraud" in order to get Trump's endorsement. Obviously, the far-right position makes some voters uneasy. The results of the election revealed a rather unpleasant fact about Trump - Trump's influence and appeal is much weaker than before, and Trump's endorsement is not effective anymore.

Trumpers are showing frustration, and there are even voices questioning whether Trump should lead the Republican Party. Right-wing Chinese Trumpers have wavered in their positions and even contradicted themselves on disinformation narrative.

2. Internet refugees from mainland China gather at Twitter, whose rightward turn is causing concern.

After Musk completed his takeover of Twitter, hate speech and disinformation has increased on Twitter, and after feeling the chaos of Twitter after the Musk acquisition, many people left for the decentralized social media platform Mastodon.

Twitter, a widely recognized off-firewall social media outlet, quickly became the frontline for reporting on the protests in China against covid lockdowns. Twitter user "Teacher Li is not your teacher" accepted contributions from followers, focusing on related marches and developments across the country and around the world. China's tight censorship has made Twitter a gathering place for internet refugees, and concerned mainland netizens have chosen to use Twitter and Telegram groups as communication tools to spread messages and organize events. After the protests were brought to the attention of officials, police focused on whether Twitter apps were installed when searching passersby's phones on the street.

At that time, if you searched Twitter for Chinese topic entries for protest cities (e.g. Shanghai protest, Guangzhou march), a lot of spam ads, pornographic content, and even glitched code appeared.

3. The lasting impact of far-right conspiracy theories, which transcend national boundaries and create political divisions, should not be underestimated.

The influence of far-right conspiracy theories lies in their ability to create fear and division, and in doing so, achieve the goal of overthrowing the existing political order. These conspiracy theories are often false and misleading, but they are highly communicative because they carry a mystique that can attract the attention of some people and evoke the emotions of those who follow them. Through the Internet platform, far-right conspiracy theories are able to cross national borders and influence people's perceptions and behaviors on a global scale. Its influence cannot be ignored.

One of Musk's tweets in December was accused of luring users into believing in QAnon. He tweeted "Follow the White Rabbit", an expression that QAnon believers use to spread conspiracy theories.
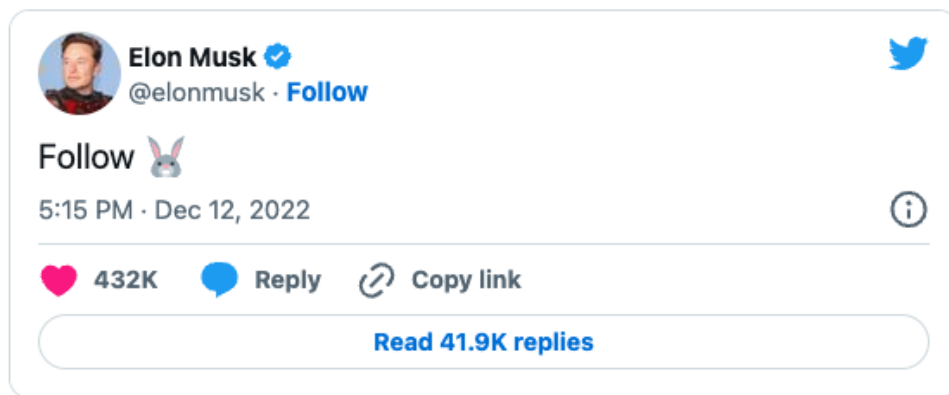
It's hard to know if Musk really meant to call users to believe in conspiracy theories, but some QAnon believers have already linked the tweet to a broader conspiracy theory.

Key Narratives

Keyword 1: Midterm elections, Democrats, Republicans, Arizona, Trump

In November 2022, as the election began, rumors of election fraud became widespread again. Particularly after the Republican Party's pre-election hype that there would be a "Red Wave" that did not materialize, many on the right claimed that the Democrats were outperforming only because of fraud. These statements once again framed mail-in ballots as a "cheating tactic". The specific disinformation is as follows.

1. Election Fraud Rhetoric: Rumors cite evidence of "cheating" in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Southern California.
2. Framing the failure of a Trump-endorsed candidate as persecution of Trump.
3. Arizona's governor candidate Kari Lake (R) released a video accusing Maricopa County of election corruption (many Chinese users retweeted and translated the video).
4. The House of Representatives passed an amendment to the 1887 "Election Count Act," which is a "thief calling out a thief" and trying to cover up leftist election fraud.

卡丽雷克痛斥马里科帕郡认证全然失败的选举结果誓言抗争到底

北美保守评论-3
1.19K subscribers

Subscribe

278 views 2 months ago

首先，我想让你知道，在这场战斗中，我坚定地与你一起抗争
亚利桑那,美国,如果我们现在不站出来发严谴责亚利桑那州的历史上最不诚实的选举,我真的很担心我们的未来
你们知道,我在竞选活动中有多努力带领我们的运动,为我们的问题带来常识性的解决方案。 Show more

Screenshot from Youtube

幺蛾子来了！临近中期选举，南加州惊曝大规模重复选票

Original   Jenny88zz   大洛杉矶LA   2022-10-18 14:22   Posted on 美国

Screenshot from Wechat

Screenshot from Twitter

Keyword 2: Elon Musk, Twitter Files

Elon Musk officially acquired Twitter for $44 billion on October 27, 2022, and to Chinese conservatives, Musk's arrival was an opportunity to "vindicate" the Republican Party and even Trump himself. Because Musk himself is so eager to tweet his personal opinions, even those containing disinformation, many of his tweets have become the direct source of some of the Chinese-language disinformation. More dangerously, Musk fired regulatory staff after taking over Twitter and continued to voice his support for so-called "free speech," allowing Twitter to become a platform full of harmful disinformation. The specific disinformation is as follows.

1. Musk publicly claims to have special documents on the Hunter Biden scandal Musk publicly claimed that Twitter interfered with the 2020 election.
2. Musk spread rumors that Paul Pelosi was attacked at home, and that the attacker himself was a male prostitute.

Screenshot from Wechat

Screenshot from Twitter

Keyword 3: Immigration, Border Security, Florida Governor, Texas Governor

Starting in mid-September, the governors of Texas and Florida once again began busing and flying undocumented immigrants from the border to areas such as New York and the East Coast, more notoriously to the island of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. This practice quickly became an "orgy" of reckless anti-immigrant arguments by Chinese-speaking conservatives on various platforms, and many supporters overstated the help Biden's immigration policies provided to undocumented immigrants in order to portray the act as a legitimate backlash against the left, further sparking panic among Chinese-speaking users. The specific disinformation is as follows.

1. When illegal immigrants are sent to the Vice President's doorstep / New York / Martha's Vineyard Island/ Massachusetts/ and other areas with Democratic majorities, the residents protest. California allows all illegal immigrants to get IDs and allows them to receive welfare.
2. Biden's immigration policy allows tens of millions of undocumented immigrants to pour into the US.
3. New York accommodates undocumented immigrants in Times Square luxury hotels.

重磅！美国国会大赦1100万非移 将吸引更多的非法移民！？

老编 大纽约生活网 2022-11-19 03:30 Posted on 美国

Screenshot from Wechat

Thread

曹長青 ✓
@CaoChangqing

德州州长把非法移民空运到左派大本营的麻州玛莎葡萄园岛。该岛名人富豪云集，克林顿、奥巴马夫妇还有众多大明星在那有豪宅，被称为"东好莱坞"。左疯们平时高调欢迎难民，但真来了，他们没一个（有大豪宅）愿意收留暂住，全都拒绝。当地机构说，要把这些难民运到美国其它地方。这些道德婊，只是立牌坊。

Translate Tweet

10:02 AM · Sep 16, 2022

250 **Retweets**   7 **Quote Tweets**   1,303 **Likes**

Screenshot from Twitter

反对 ▎激励更多的非法移民涌入

　　这项法案毫无疑问得到了民主党的一致通过，但也有许多共和党议员表示反对，尤其是最新数据显示一年超过200万非法移民涌入美国后，导致边境危机，这项法案被指责是号召的旗帜，号召更多非法移民涌入美国。

　　除此以外，这项法案还将进一步增加纳税人的负担，最简单的是，制造新身份证的成本就需要增加财政投入，除此以外，加州已经通过法案给予非法移民免费医疗保险，越来越多的非法移民涌入，意味着这笔支出将会无限度扩大。

　　先不说这项政策会不会造成将来加税，就从公平和平等的角度来说，对合法移民都是非常不公平的。众所周知，亲属移民需要经历漫长的排期和无穷无尽的审核，然后还需要经济担保才能最终获得绿卡。

Screenshot from Wechat

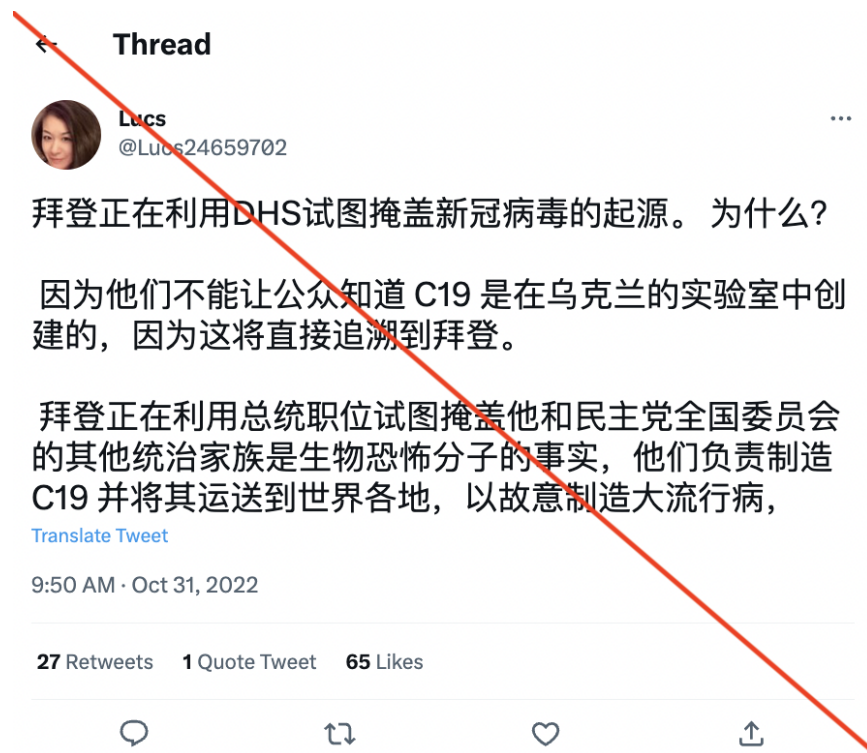Keyword 4: COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccine

In mid-October, an article about "US university develops synthetic strain of COVID-19 with 80% lethality rate" was widely circulated on WeChat and platforms mainly used by mainland Chinese users. Once again, this became fake news repeating the "COVID-19 is man-made" meme. The specific disinformation is as follows.

1. Multiple serious and fatal complications following vaccination with the COVID-19 vaccine.
2. U.S. lab creates COVID-19 strain with an 80% lethality rate.
3. Biden administration linked to origin of virus (from Ukrainian lab).

Thread

Lucs
@Lucs24659702

拜登正在利用DHS试图掩盖新冠病毒的起源。 为什么?

因为他们不能让公众知道 C19 是在乌克兰的实验室中创建的，因为这将直接追溯到拜登。

拜登正在利用总统职位试图掩盖他和民主党全国委员会的其他统治家族是生物恐怖分子的事实，他们负责制造 C19 并将其运送到世界各地，以故意制造大流行病,

Translate Tweet

9:50 AM · Oct 31, 2022

27 Retweets   **1** Quote Tweet   **65** Likes

Screenshot from Twitter

← **Tweet**

Amy
@dongxue815   ...

由凝块引起的梗塞和血管意外、血栓形成和昏厥。仅在美国每天就有 400 名接种者死亡。也就是一个月 12000。记录来自covid，但每个人都接种了疫苗，死因是疫苗的合成蛋白

美国意外死亡人数增加了 47%，自杀率增加了 18%。每月有 26,000 人死于心脏病，11,000 人死于中风

每月总共有超过 7万人死于疫苗

Translate Tweet

Screenshot from Twitter
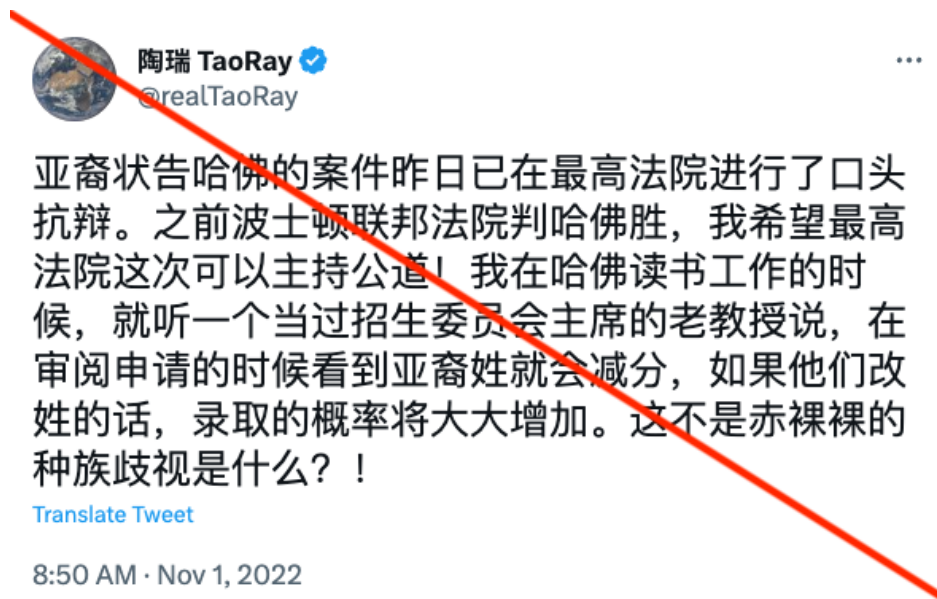
美国大学研发新冠合成毒株，致死率高达80%？真相到底是什么？

蜻蜓队长 北美留学生观察 2022-10-18 07:47 Posted on 美国

Screenshot from Wechat

Keyword 5: Affirmative Action, Education, Gender

At the end of October, the Supreme Court heard the case of Students for Fair Admissions against Harvard and the University of North Carolina, which will challenge affirmative action. In addition, most of the discussion around education is related to "wokeness," such as gender diversity, CRT, and other trendy topics. The specific disinformation is as follows.

1. Harvard uses affirmative action to racially discriminate against Asians.
2. The left guides teenagers to sex change and evil beyond imagination.
3. Disney made kids spell "I love Satan" in a Christmas miniseries.

陶瑞 TaoRay ✔
@realTaoRay

亚裔状告哈佛的案件昨日已在最高法院进行了口头抗辩。之前波士顿联邦法院判哈佛胜，我希望最高法院这次可以主持公道！我在哈佛读书工作的时候，就听一个当过招生委员会主席的老教授说，在审阅申请的时候看到亚裔姓就会减分，如果他们改姓的话，录取的概率将大大增加。这不是赤裸裸的种族歧视是什么？！

Translate Tweet

8:50 AM · Nov 1, 2022

Screenshot from Twitter

陶瑞 TaoRay ✔
@realTaoRay

美国左派在青少年变性问题上的邪恶超乎想象，是历史上最反人类的事情之一！完全不是LGBTQ平权的问题。那些反驳我的华左们。我真心祷告你们的孩子永远不会因为正常的成长烦恼，就向你们要求变性。你们带孩子去看心理医生，得不到心里引导，反倒得到鼓励，然后把你们教训一顿。这样的案例我屡见不鲜。

Translate Tweet

8:32 AM · Nov 21, 2022

Screenshot from Twitter

一±2.0 🇺🇸🇮🇱🇷🇺 ✔
@Jessie2021626

抵制迪士尼😡😡

🔥在新的迪士尼圣诞迷你剧中，小精灵孩子们拿着巨大的字母拼写"WE LOVE YOU SATAN"/我们爱撒旦魔鬼😤
🔥"让我们的孩子接触到这样的事情，这令人作呕，绝对令人作呕。"

Translate Tweet

Screenshot from Twitter