

X Under Musk: Covert Political Amplification, Regulatory Evasion, and the Hijacking of Democratic Infrastructure

When Elon Musk purchased Twitter in 2022 and renamed it X, he cloaked his acquisition in the language of civic virtue: a “digital town square” where free speech would flourish. That framing was a lie. In practice, Musk has transformed X into a platform that actively distorts political discourse through opaque algorithms, monetized influence, and deliberate dismantling of transparency mechanisms. Far from preserving neutrality, X has become a **vector for stealth political promotion**, tilted heavily in favor of far-right narratives and authoritarian sympathies.

Regulators in the European Union have confirmed what researchers, journalists, and civil society groups have long suspected: **X is in breach of legal obligations on ad transparency, political labeling, and researcher access**. These aren’t minor technical infractions. They are structural decisions that enable **undisclosed political influence at scale**. Musk’s platform doesn’t just *permit* manipulation - it **profits from it**, using paid account privileges and algorithmic incentives to amplify certain political actors while concealing the machinery behind them.

This essay lays out a clear indictment: **X is functioning as an undeclared political advertising system**, in direct violation of EU law, and likely in contravention of U.K. and U.S. campaign transparency rules as well. The evidence is overwhelming, the motive is visible, and the impact is global.

From Oversight to Obfuscation: A Pattern of Evasion

Within weeks of Musk taking control, Twitter’s already fragile governance was dismantled. The **Trust and Safety Council** - an external accountability body - was abruptly disbanded. Policies were rewritten, teams gutted, and access for civil society and journalists curtailed. Musk’s vision of “free speech” quickly revealed itself as **free rein for those aligned with his ideological agenda**.

At the same time, Musk introduced **paid verification**, effectively monetizing visibility. No longer a badge of authenticity, the blue check became a ticket to algorithmic favoritism. Verified accounts - often political operatives, provocateurs, or propagandists - received distribution boosts and, in many cases, **shared in platform revenue**, directly linking financial incentives to political messaging.

This wasn’t a mistake. It was a **strategic redesign**: strip out safeguards, blur the lines between organic and paid speech, and weaponize recommendation systems in service of

Musk's political alliances.

Algorithmic Manipulation Is Not a Side Effect - It's the Business Model

X's recommender system is not a neutral arbiter. It is a **deliberately tuned political amplifier**. Internal research conducted before Musk's takeover confirmed that Twitter's timeline already **amplified right-leaning content disproportionately**. Under Musk, that imbalance has deepened.

X's open-source code drop in March 2023 was little more than a distraction. While it revealed a skeletal framework for ranking tweets, it **withheld key operational data**: real-time parameter changes, manual overrides, and influence of paid status on visibility. The public still has no access to the variables that matter: Who gets boosted? Who gets buried? And why?

What's clear from independent audits is this: **political content from right-wing, nationalist, and conspiracy-aligned accounts dominates the "For You" feed** - especially when those accounts are monetized or verified. In effect, X is **selling political reach** while denying that such transactions constitute advertising.

This is not speculation. It's measurable bias, backed by multiple peer-reviewed studies and sock-puppet experiments. When engagement becomes the organizing principle of a platform, **outrage wins, truth loses, and demagogues flourish**.

Dark Patterns, Fake Transparency, and Paid Political Influence

The EU's preliminary findings against X under the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** and **Regulation 2024/900 on Political Advertising** are damning:

- X **deceives users** through dark patterns and deceptive interface design.
- It **fails to maintain a functional ad repository**, denying voters the right to know who is targeting them.
- It **blocks legitimate researchers** from accessing the data needed to audit systemic risk.

These are not accidents. They are tactics. X **deliberately withholds access**, knowing that full transparency would expose **coordinated political boosting** masquerading as organic engagement.

Paid verification is central to this scheme. Verified accounts enjoy **preferential treatment in rankings, eligibility for revenue sharing, and increased reach** - even when their content spreads disinformation, hate, or political propaganda. This feature effectively turns the platform into a **pay-to-play megaphone for ideological actors**.

In the European Union, this behavior directly violates laws requiring disclosure of political advertising, sponsor identity, and use of sensitive personal data for targeting. In the U.K., it runs afoul of the **digital imprint requirements** under the Elections Act. In the U.S., it skirts dangerously close to breaching **FEC and FTC regulations** on online political communications and deceptive marketing.

Elon Musk Is Not a Neutral Observer - He Is the Architect of Political Distortion

By 2024, Musk had **publicly endorsed Donald Trump**, hosted far-right figures on his platform, and engaged directly in political messaging under the guise of corporate policy. These aren't casual endorsements - they're **material interventions by a platform owner** in electoral discourse.

Control over platform policy, engineering design, and revenue incentives allows Musk to **tilt the system** to reward his political allies and suppress dissent. The result is a feedback loop: those who flatter his views or provoke maximum engagement rise to the top; others are drowned out or demonetized.

This isn't just dangerous - it's **structural bias codified into code**. No amount of posturing about "free speech" can mask the **conflict of interest** when one billionaire controls the infrastructure of political visibility.

The Legal Line Has Been Crossed

In the EU, the threshold for "political advertising" is clear: **any paid or materially supported dissemination of political content must be labeled, archived, and auditable**. X has **flouted all three obligations**.

The **Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising Regulation (2024/900)** mandates disclosures that X has systematically ignored. The **Digital Services Act** requires very large platforms like X to grant access to vetted researchers and maintain trustworthy ad repositories. X has defied these rules - and regulators are already moving to enforce.

In the U.K., the **Elections Act 2022** demands digital imprints - identifying who is responsible for political messaging. X's current setup - where paid accounts push political messages without any label, funding disclosure, or targeting transparency - **makes a mockery of this law**.

In the U.S., the FEC and FTC have jurisdiction over express advocacy and deceptive marketing. **Paid visibility, monetization, and algorithmic manipulation by a platform owner** are not exempt from scrutiny. The only reason no enforcement action has yet been taken is the **regulatory vacuum created by platform lobbying and legal ambiguity** - not legal innocence.

The Evidence Is There - X Just Doesn't Want You to See It

The crucial records exist. They include:

- **Internal communications** detailing how political content is treated, ranked, and monetized.
- **Billing and sponsorship records** showing who paid for what reach.
- **Algorithmic change logs and override reports** that reveal who gets boosted and when.
- **Ad repository data** that should, by law, disclose political campaigns, sponsors, and targeting strategies.

X refuses to provide them - not because they don't exist, but because they **would prove the platform is operating as an undeclared political advertising system.**

Every regulatory tool exists to compel disclosure. The EU is already using them. The U.S. and U.K. should follow.

Excuses Won't Work Anymore

- **"We open-sourced the algorithm."** → False. The code drop is incomplete and out-dated. Key weights, policies, and live interventions remain hidden.
- **"Engagement isn't ideological."** → Irrelevant. Engagement-maximizing systems structurally favor extreme, tribal, and often right-wing content. That's a design choice with political consequences.
- **"There's no law against algorithms."** → Misleading. There are laws against **undisclosed political influence, non-transparent ad systems, and platforms deceiving users about paid content.** X is violating all three.

This Is Not a Debate - It's a Democratic Emergency

Political speech is not the problem. **Undisclosed manipulation of political speech is.** When platforms obscure who is speaking, who is paying, and how visibility is engineered, the foundation of democratic discourse collapses.

X is not just failing the transparency test - it is **actively undermining it.** Its systems **blur the line between organic virality and paid propaganda,** while its leadership benefits politically and financially from the confusion.

This is no longer a question of platform policy. It's a question of **legal accountability and democratic survival.**

Conclusion: The Case Against X

X is operating as an undeclared political ad engine. It sells influence, obscures sponsorship, disables oversight, and rewards the content that best serves its owner's ideological and financial interests.

The legal obligations are clear. The violations are documented. The consequences are immense.

It's time to stop pretending this is a free-speech debate. It's time for regulators to act - and for citizens to demand that **platforms that shape political reality be subject to political law.**

This is not a glitch. It is the plan.