

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000093/25
to the Commission**

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(13 January 2025)

Subject: Protecting the Bundestag elections — threat of X manipulating votes

X is not a neutral platform, given that its owner, Elon Musk, is actively campaigning for one of the parties standing in the elections, the AfD, which has in part been categorised as unconstitutional in Germany. During the US election campaign, Musk's own X account, and republican accounts, gained a much higher reach after he joined the election campaign. There is reason to suspect that X's management artificially created this reach by manipulating the site's algorithm. We, the undersigned, believe that Musk's personal involvement in the German Bundestag election campaign, his soon-to-be key position in the US Government and his power to influence the political agenda in Germany by controlling X's algorithm pose a systemic risk to public discourse and elections as set out in Article 34 of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and that urgent interim measures need to be taken by the Commission to protect the Bundestag elections.

1. Does the Commission agree that X currently poses a threat to public discourse and elections in Germany?
2. What immediate measures will it take to protect the 2025 Bundestag elections and other elections in future?
3. Is it planning longer-term investigations and measures under the DSA against X's recommendation algorithm?

Submitted: 13.1.2025

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(4 March 2025)

Democracy is a core value of the EU, with free and fair elections at its heart. Member States are responsible for organising elections according to national constitutional rules, legislation, international obligations, and EU law.

The Commission supports Member States in election matters mainly via the framework of the European Coordination Network on Elections. The Commission monitors compliance by providers of very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines (VLOSEs) with the Digital Services Act (DSA) ⁽¹⁾ in relation to the provision of those services in the EU and has provided election guidance ⁽²⁾.

For the German Federal election, the Bundesnetzagentur and the Commission have organised an election roundtable ⁽³⁾ and a stress test ⁽⁴⁾ involving providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs, German authorities, and civil society. Signatories of the EU Code of Conduct on Disinformation, which contains election commitments, have activated the Rapid Response System for the elections ⁽⁵⁾.

The Commission has been investigating X ⁽⁶⁾, designated as a VLOP, for suspected breaches of, amongst others, Articles 34(1) and (2) and 35(1) DSA which oblige to diligently assess systemic risks and put in place effective mitigation measures. The current investigations include risks to civic discourse and elections in the EU, including risks stemming from the design and functioning of its algorithm.

Recently, the Commission ordered X ⁽⁷⁾ to preserve documents on future changes to the design and functioning of its recommender algorithms. The Commission also requested internal documentation on its recommender system relating to past changes and ordered access to certain technical interfaces to allow fact-finding on content moderation and account virality.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065>

⁽²⁾ The Commission has published guidelines for providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-providers-vlops-and-vloses-mitigation-systemic-risks-electoral-processes>

⁽³⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/digital-services-coordinator-germany-hosts-roundtable-online-platforms>

⁽⁴⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/german-digital-services-coordinator-tests-platforms-readiness-under-digital-services-act>

⁽⁵⁾ Previously used in EU, French, Romanian, and Croatian elections, the RRS allows non-platform signatories to quickly report time-sensitive threats to electoral integrity with platforms based on their policies.

⁽⁶⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>

⁽⁷⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-addresses-additional-investigatory-measures-x-ongoing-proceedings-under-digital-services>