

X versus reality: Data suggests political posts on X are inconsistent with voter behavior

Bond Benton, Professor of Communication, Montclair State University

Yi Luo, Associate Professor of Communication, Montclair State University

Jin-A Choi, Associate Professor of Communication, Montclair State University

ABSTRACT: This study from Montclair State University researchers in the Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication in the College of Communication and Media shows that the volume of political posts on X (formerly Twitter) may not reflect actual voter behavior. The gap between post volume about candidates and real election votes was nearly 40% in the analyzed case of the New Jersey gubernatorial election. Contributing factors to this gap may include the volume of ostensibly “American” political accounts that are foreign sourced, bot-based activity, and overall platform infrastructure/algorithms. Results identified 108,640 posts for Mikie Sherrill with 230,277 posts for Jack Ciattarelli in the period studied with nearly 5X the total number of posts for Ciattarelli over Sherrill on Election Day. Additionally, the study found 15.5% more

posts on X expressing a positive sentiment for Ciattarelli in the same period.

Despite this, final vote totals for the election favored Sherrill by nearly 14%.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Historically, Twitter was a significant social media space for the discussion of political topics and themes. In 2022, Twitter was purchased by Elon Musk and renamed X with a host of controversial alterations to the platform's previous iteration (Benton et al., 2022; Bond, 2022; Dang, 2022; Lorenz, 2022). More recently, the national origin of accounts on the platform were made viewable and revealed numerous ostensibly "American" political accounts were actually based overseas (CBS News, 2025; Sardarizadeh et al., 2025; Yerushalmy, 2025). This is in addition to ongoing concerns about the proliferation of bot-based and AI-based accounts on X (Rothke, 2025; Taylor, 2023). Cumulatively, these items raise questions about the extent to which activity on X reflects authentic political sentiment and voter behavior.

X VERSUS REALITY: RESEARCH METHOD

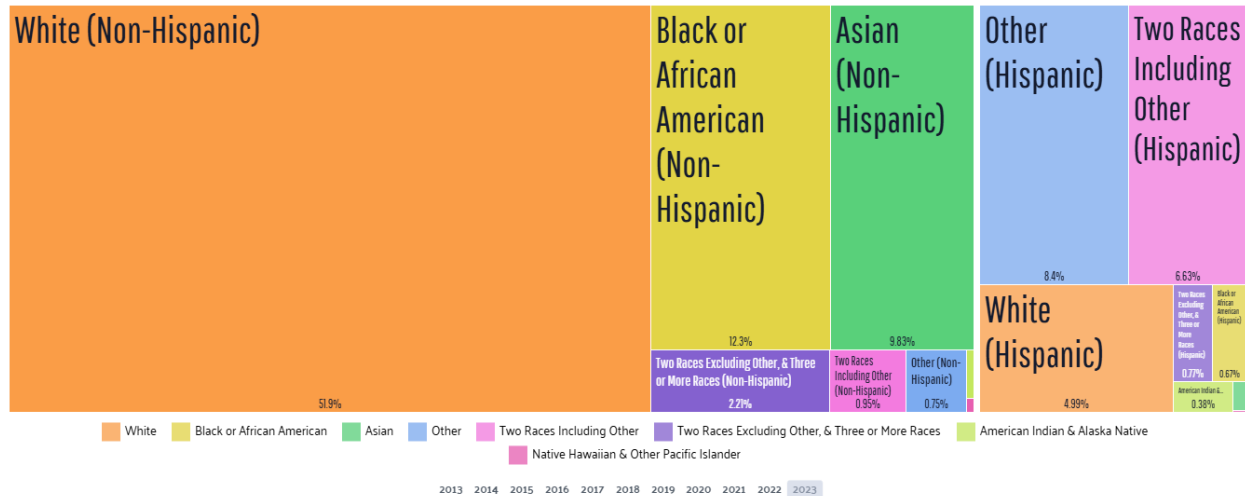
A case for the assessment of the relationship between X and voter behavior was presented with the 2025 New Jersey gubernatorial election between Democrat Mikie Sherrill and Republican Jack Ciattarelli. This high profile race in a densely populated state was seen a significant barometer for larger national trends in American politics generating record campaign spending and media attention (O’Dea and Hulac, 2025). A particularly relevant feature of the race was polling prior to the election suggesting an extremely close race (Biryukov and Nieto-Munoz, 2025; Mumford, 2025; Wildstein, 2025). In such a context, social media would appear to be a space where public political sentiment could offer insight into voter behavior potentially missed by polling. Substantial scholarship suggests that visibility of a term or brand in social media can affect consumer behavior (Oumayma, 2019). The success of political campaigns has also been correlated to social media activity related to specific topics and issues (Ahmad et al., 2024; Digrizia et al., 2013). That said, the items previously noted about X may indicate a growing cleavage between authentic public sentiment and platform activity. With that in mind, the following exploratory questions emerge:

- **Do posts about political candidates on X correlate to voter behavior?**
- **Is sentiment about candidates correlated to post volume?**

To answer these questions, this study utilizes the Tweet Binder analytics program.

Tweet Binder represents a robust data collection and analysis service focused exclusively on activity on the X platform. Collected data using Tweet Binder can include both the frequency with which a specific term appears along with sentiment analysis of posts including that term (*Tweet Binder*, 2019; *Tweet Binder*, 2020).

The 2025 New Jersey gubernatorial election provides an excellent case for analysis as the race elicited national attention in relation to a campaign in a densely populated state. Thus, the race produced an extensive number of social media posts with the New Jersey electorate representing one of the most diverse states in the country (New Jersey, n.d.).



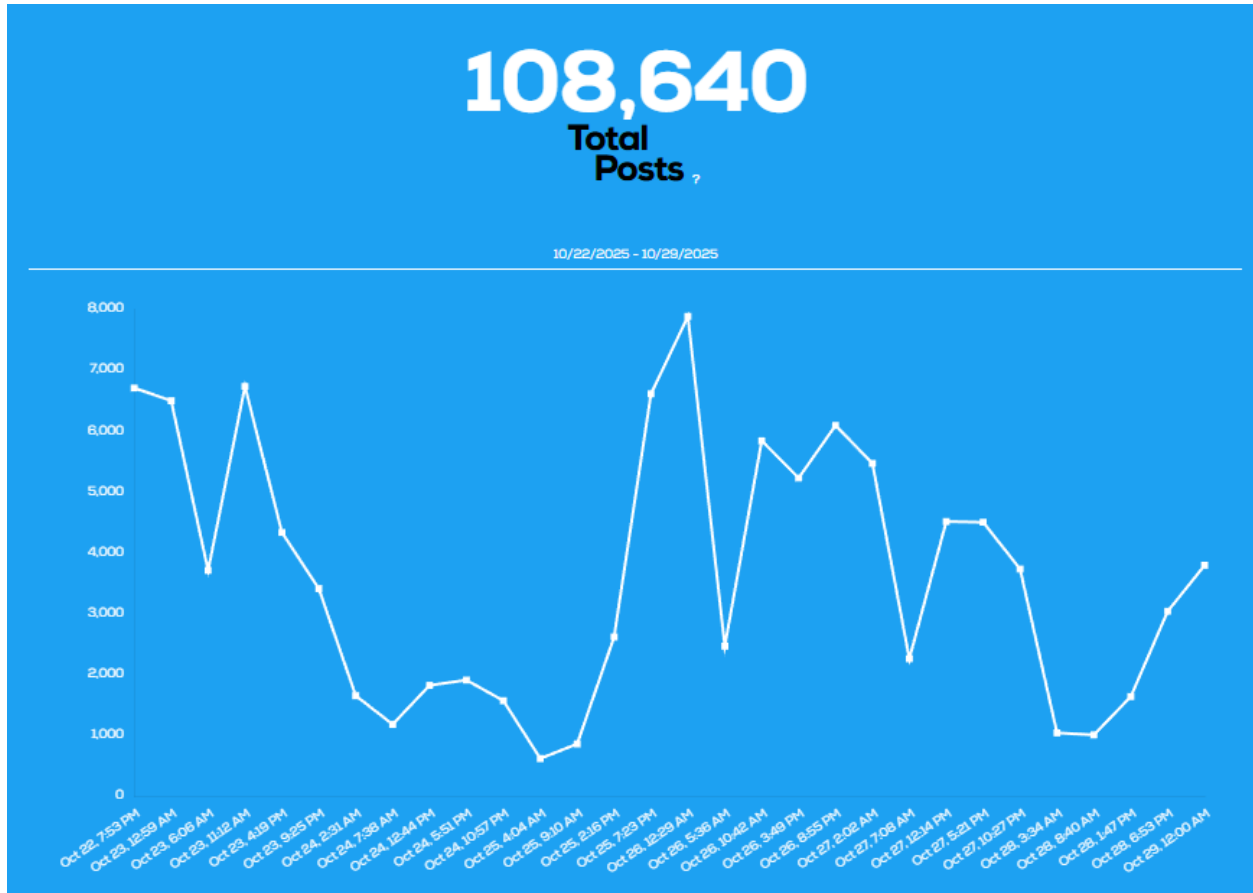
Source: Data USA

By analyzing frequency and sentiment on X regarding the two gubernatorial candidates and comparing this data with final election vote totals, insight can be discovered about the relationship between platform activity and real-world voter behavior.

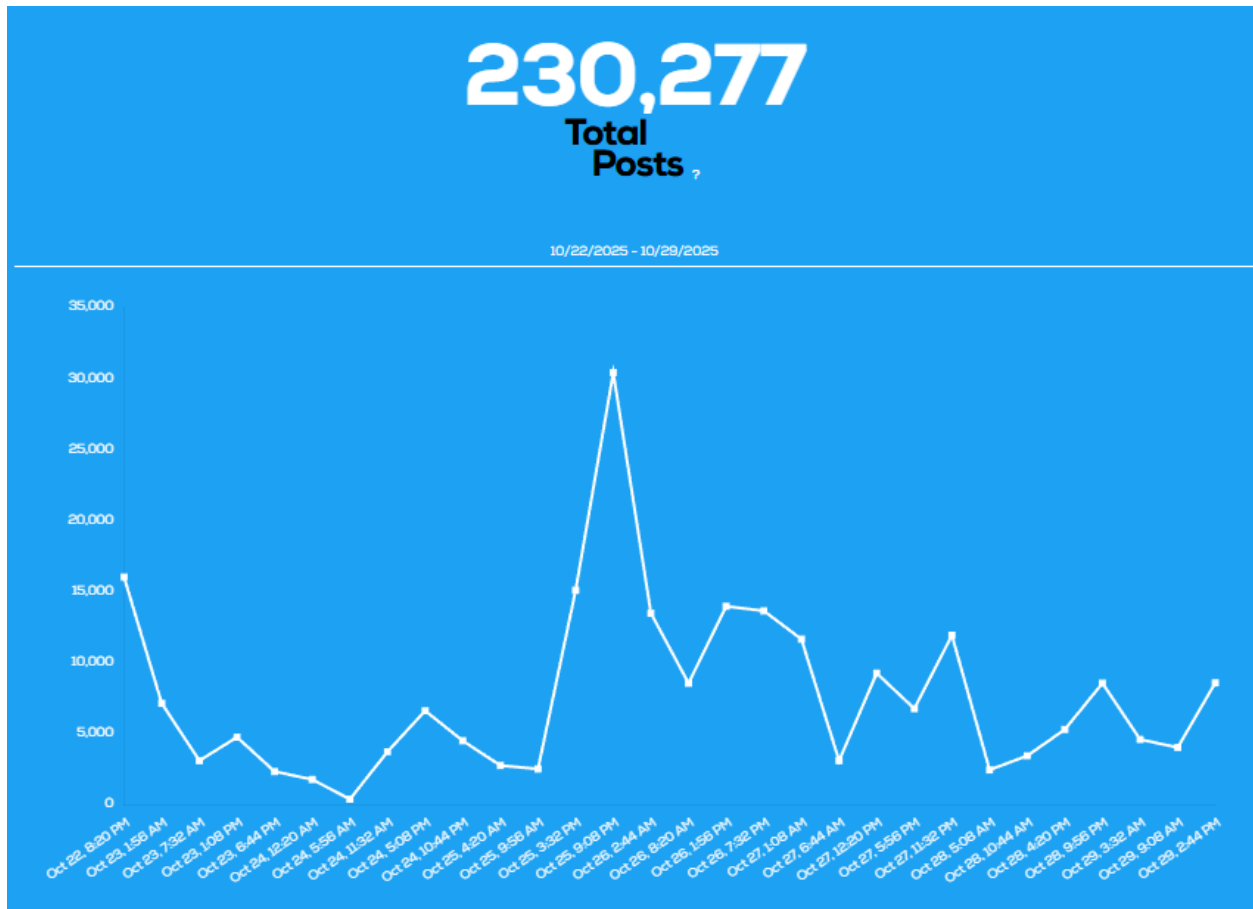
RESULTS

Data from 338,000 posts was collected for the period of 10/22/2025 - 10/29/2025 (selected as a crucial period in the run up to the election) with the number of posts about each candidate identified. A sizable gap in post totals related to each

candidate appears notable, with Ciattarelli posts more than doubling those discussing Sherrill.

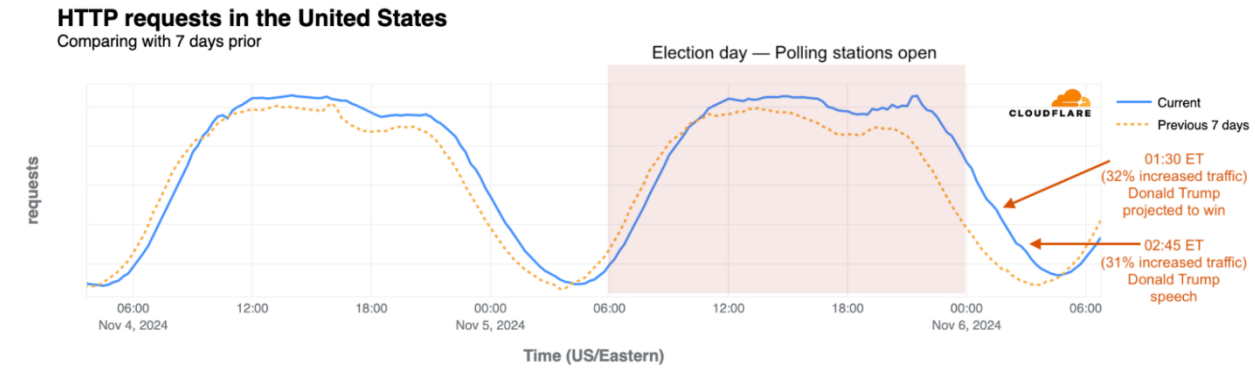


Total Posts: "Mikie Sherrill"



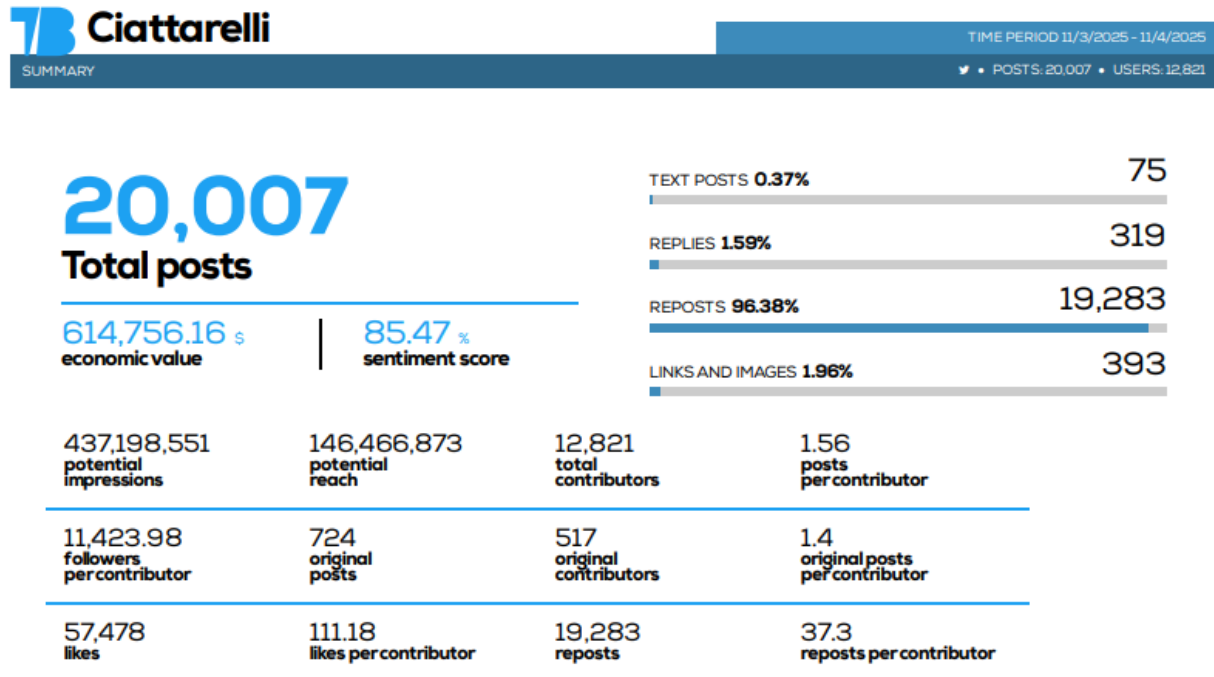
Total Posts: "Jack Ciattarelli"

Election day represents a period of increased activity around political campaigns in the online space (Tomé, 2024), with traffic increasing in social media.

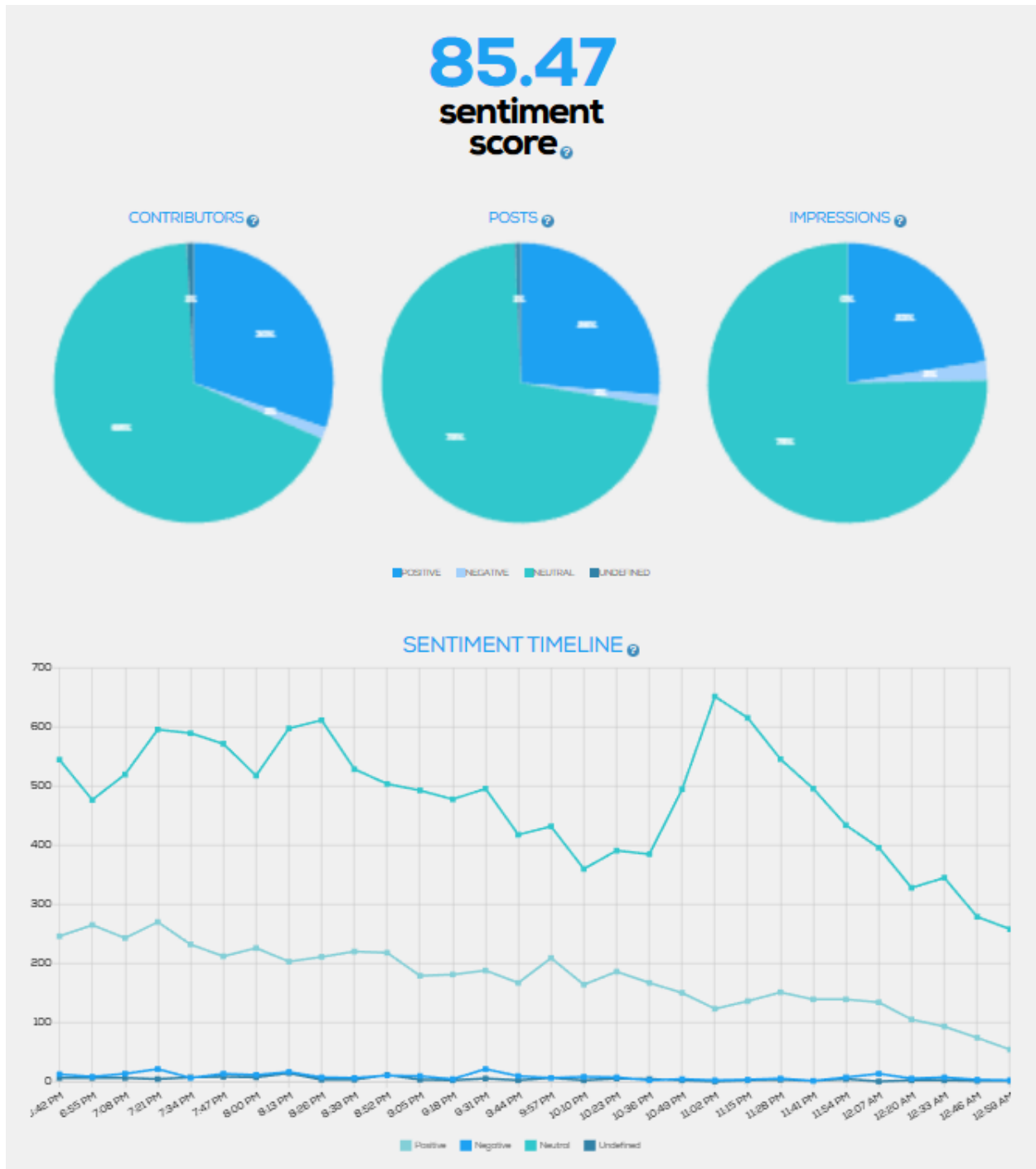


SOURCE: The Cloudflare Blog

As such, deeper analysis (including sentiment) was conducted for posts on X on 11/4/2025. Results suggest an even greater gap in post volume than in the previous sample.



Also notable is that the post volume for Ciattarelli was matched by overwhelmingly more positive than negative sentiment on the part of users. In the studied period, posts identified as “positive” by Tweet Binder’s sentiment analysis metric were thirty times greater than those identified as negative netting an overall sentiment score of 85.47.



In contrast, the total posts referencing Sherrill were a fraction of the total for those about Ciattarelli; less than one-fourth the total of her opponent.

TB Sherrill

SUMMARY

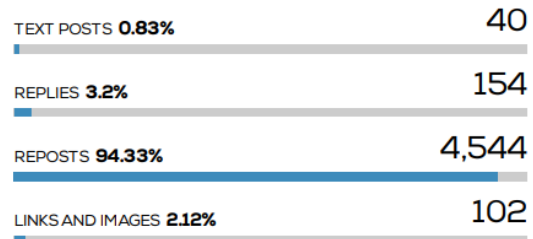
TIME PERIOD 11/4/2025 - 11/4/2025

• POSTS: 4,817 • USERS: 3,741

4,817
Total posts

81,045.38 \$
economic value

74 %
sentiment score



109,210,424
potential
impressions

29,678,939
potential
reach

3,741
total
contributors

1.29
posts
per contributor

7,933.42
followers
per contributor

273
original
posts

215
original
contributors

1.27
original posts
per contributor

12,243
likes

56.94
likes per contributor

4,544
reposts

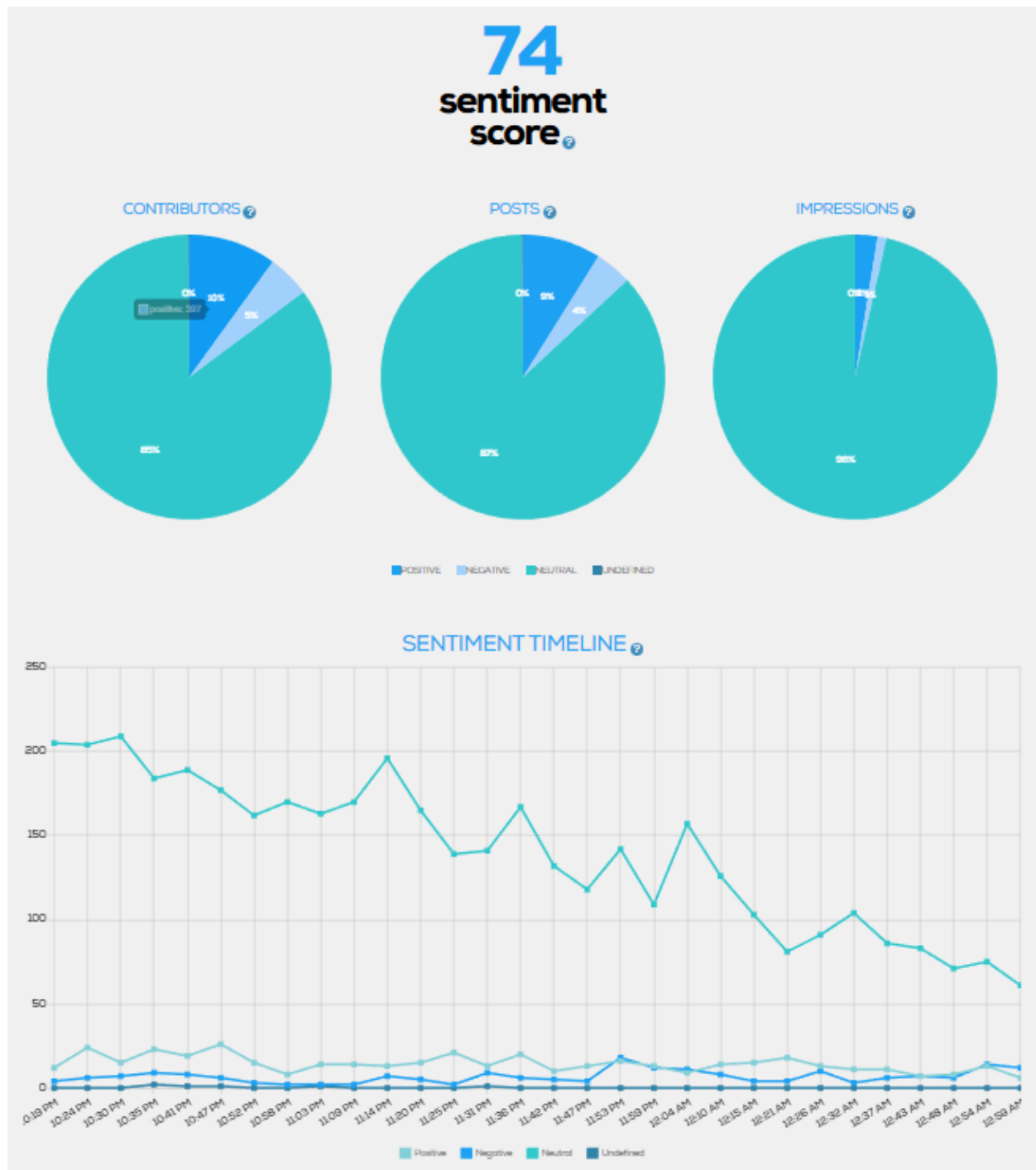
21.13
reposts per contributor



TweetBinder

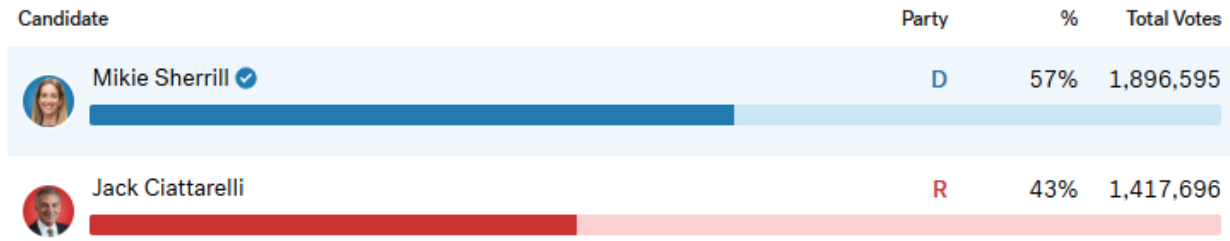
Positive sentiment in posts about Sherrill lagged behind Ciattarelli, as well.

Sentiment assessment showed sentiment in posts about Sherrill on X were 15.5% more negative than in posts about Ciattarelli.



Cumulatively, this would seem to indicate a race favoring Ciattarelli, given the substantially higher number of posts his candidacy generated along with greater

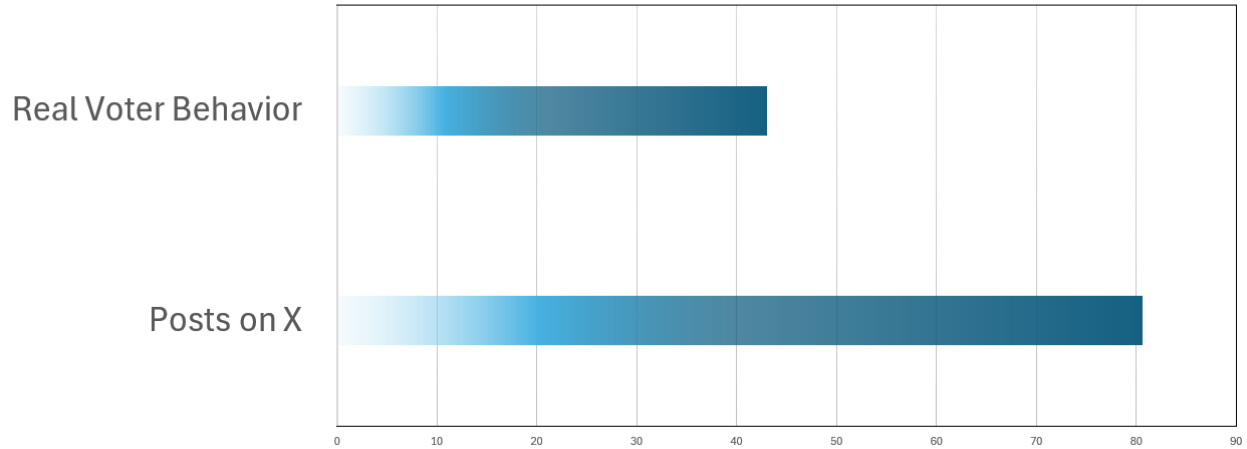
favorability in the posts overall. The actual vote outcome, however, shows a significant gap between activity and sentiment on X and real-world voter behavior, with Sherrill winning by a seemingly unexpected wide margin.



SOURCE: ABC News

In sum, activity related to this election on X was significantly incongruent to the election outcome. There was gap of nearly 40 percent between X posts totals for candidates and the results generated by actual voters.

X POSTS COMPARED TO VOTER BEHAVIOR



DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Ascertaining the cause of this disparity is beyond the scope of this study. It is possible that the number of politically focused accounts on X that are foreign sourced or bot-based offers an impression that does not match the perceptions and actions of real voters in the United States. It is, additionally, also possible that online advocates for specific candidates and themes may post more frequently to facilitate the impression that they represent a majority view (despite being in the minority). Likewise, it is similarly plausible that platform structures offer outsized visibility to specific political viewpoints (Booth, 2025).

While a clear answer on the causes of this discrepancy is not immediately clear, future research should endeavor to assess the reason for this discrepancy with ongoing assessment in future elections. Minimally, this study suggests that social media users should take caution when content on a platform would seem to indicate a widely held belief or value. There may be a significant gap between what is happening online and what is happening in reality.

WORKS CITED

Ahmad F, Revelin MA, Gunawan AAS, et al. (2024) The influence of social media on voter behavior, public opinion, and partisan tendencies during election campaigns in Indonesia: Systematic literature review. In: *2024 International Seminar on Application for Technology of Information and Communication (iSemantic)*, 21 September 2024, pp. 563–568. IEEE. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/iSemantic63362.2024.10762311> (accessed 30 November 2025).

Benton B, Choi J-A, Luo Y, et al. (2022) Hate Speech Spikes on Twitter After Elon Musk Acquires the Platform. *School of Communication and Media, Montclair State University*. forthcoming 2022.

Biryukov N and Nieto-Munoz S (2025) New poll finds dead heat in NJ governor's race •. Available at: <https://newjerseymonitor.com/briefs/new-poll-finds-dead-heat-in-nj-governors-race/> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Bond S (2022) Elon Musk said Twitter wouldn't become a "hellscape." It's already changing. *NPR*, 31 October. NPR. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/10/31/1132906782/elon-musk-twitter-pelosi-conspiracy> (accessed 9 July 2024).

Booth R (2025) Small changes to 'for you' feed on X can rapidly increase political polarisation. *The Guardian*, 27 November. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/nov/27/partisan-x-posts-increase-political-polarisation-among-users-social-media-research> (accessed 30 November 2025).

CBS News (2025) X's new feature reveals foreign origins of some popular U.S.

political accounts. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/x-foreign-origins-political-accounts/> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Dang S (2022) As Elon Musk takes over Twitter, free speech limits tested. Reuters.

Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/elon-musk-takes-over-twitter-free-speech-limits-tested-2022-10-28/> (accessed 9 July 2024).

Digrazia J, McKelvey K, Bollen J, et al. (2013) More tweets, more votes: social media as a quantitative indicator of political behavior. *PloS one* 8(11). Public Library of Science (PLoS): e79449.

Lorenz T (2022) 'Opening the gates of hell': Musk says he will revive banned accounts. *The Washington Post*, 24 November. The Washington Post.

Available at:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/11/24/twitter-musk-reverses-suspensions/> (accessed 24 November 2022).

Mumford C (2025) New Jersey 2025 Poll: Race for Governor in Dead Heat between Sherrill and Ciattarelli. Available at:

<https://emersoncollegepolling.com/new-jersey-2025-poll/> (accessed 29 November 2025).

New Jersey (n.d.). Available at: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/new-jersey> (accessed 30 November 2025).

O'Dea C and Hulac BJ (2025) NJ governor's race set campaign finance records. Available at: <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2025/11/nj-governors-race-sets-campaign-finance-records/> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Oumayma B (2019) Social media made me buy it: the impact of social media on consumer purchase behavior. In: *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Smart City Applications*, New York, NY, USA, 2 October 2019. ACM. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/3368756.3369016> (accessed 30 November 2025).

Rothke B (2025) Bots are spelling the demise of X. Available at: <https://brothke.medium.com/bots-are-spelling-the-demise-of-x-604e83a9b76b> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Sardarizadeh S, Copeland T and Edgington T (2025) How X's new location feature exposed big US politics accounts. *BBC News*, 24 November. BBC News.

Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj38m11218xo> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Taylor J (2023) Bots on X worse than ever according to analysis of 1m tweets during first Republican primary debate. *The Guardian*, 9 September. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/sep/09/x-twitter-bots-republican-primary-debate-tweets-increase> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Tomé J (2024) Exploring Internet traffic shifts and cyber attacks during the 2024 US election. Available at: <https://blog.cloudflare.com/exploring-internet-traffic-shifts-and-cyber-attacks-during-the-2024-us-election/> (accessed 30 November 2025).

Tweet Binder (2019) Social Media Management with Tweet Binder. Available at: <https://www.tweetbinder.com/blog/> (accessed 16 November 2022).

Tweet Binder (2020) Metrics. Available at: <https://www.tweetbinder.com/pro-resources/metrics/> (accessed 7 December 2022).

Wildstein D (2025) N.J. governor's race is a dead heat, new poll shows. Available at: <https://newjerseyglobe.com/governor/n-j-governors-race-is-a-dead-heat-new-poll-shows/> (accessed 29 November 2025).

Yerushalmy J (2025) Foreign interference or opportunistic grifting: why are so many pro-Trump X accounts based in Asia? *The Guardian*, 27 November. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/nov/27/pro-trump-x-twitter-accounts-based-in-asia> (accessed 29 November 2025).