

ATLAS

GRAPHIKA REPORT

The #Americans

Chinese State-Linked
Influence Operation
Spamouflage Masquerades
as U.S. Voters to Push
Divisive Online Narratives
Ahead of 2024 Election

The Graphika Team

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The #Americans

Chinese State-Linked Influence Operation Spamouflage Masquerades as U.S. Voters to Push Divisive Online Narratives Ahead of 2024 Election

Key Findings

- Chinese state-linked influence operation (IO) Spamouflage has become more aggressive in its efforts to influence U.S. political conversations ahead of the 2024 presidential election. This includes expanding its use of personas that impersonate U.S. voters on social media platforms and spreading divisive narratives about sensitive social issues in the U.S.
- Through Graphika's [ATLAS intelligence reporting](#), we identified 15 Spamouflage accounts on X and one account on TikTok claiming to be U.S. citizens and/or U.S.-focused peace, human rights, and information integrity advocates frustrated by American politics and the West. We also identified a cross-platform Spamouflage persona operating as an inauthentic U.S.-focused media outlet.
- In the run-up to the 2024 election, these accounts have seeded and amplified content denigrating Democratic and Republican candidates, sowing doubt in the legitimacy of the U.S. electoral process, and spreading divisive narratives about sensitive social issues including gun control, homelessness, drug abuse, racial inequality, and the Israel-Hamas conflict. This content, some of which was almost certainly AI-generated, has targeted President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump, and, more recently, Vice President Kamala Harris.
- Despite attempts to masquerade as U.S. users and engage with hot-button issues, the accounts failed to garner significant traction in authentic online communities discussing the election. The rare exception was an inauthentic media outlet operating on TikTok which posted a video in July that has received 1.5 million views to date.
- This report corroborates and builds on research the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) [published](#) in April 2024, which documented a set of four Spamouflage accounts on X posing as supporters of Trump and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement. In conjunction with ISD's analysis, our findings suggest that Spamouflage's attempts to pose as U.S. users are more expansive than previously reported.
- We assess that Spamouflage and other Chinese IO actors will almost certainly continue their efforts to influence U.S. political conversations throughout the 2024 presidential election cycle, leveraging social divisions in a polarized information environment to portray the U.S. as a declining global power with weak leaders and a failing system of governance.

- We assess that Spamouflage and other Chinese IO actors will very likely continue to experiment with and expand on new tactics, techniques, and procedures, including using generative AI tools to create deceptive content and scale their activities, developing higher-quality inauthentic personas, and co-opting authentic online voices, such as social media influencers.
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Overview

Spamouflage (also tracked as [Dragonbridge](#), [Taizi Flood](#), and [Empire Dragon](#)) is an influence operation that Graphika has [monitored](#) since 2019. It is active across more than 40 online platforms where it employs inauthentic accounts to seed and amplify videos and cartoons that promote pro-China and anti-Western narratives. Based on open-source indicators and assessments [shared](#) by industry partners, Graphika attributes this activity with high confidence to Chinese state-linked actors.

Spamouflage's tactics have [evolved](#) over the last five years, including [engaging](#) with broader geopolitical topics, [producing](#) content in multiple languages across mainstream and alternative social media platforms, [experimenting](#) with persona building, and [leveraging](#) AI tools to create content. In that time, our monitoring shows the operation has become markedly more aggressive in its attempts to influence online discourse about U.S. politics.

- In 2020, the operation frequently criticized the U.S. political system and policies but rarely directly referenced U.S. elections.
- In the months before the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, the operation began to engage explicitly with election-related topics. It spread content that directly criticized the Republican and Democratic parties and their leaders, and cast U.S. domestic and foreign policy "failures" as a product of the country's political system.
- Since mid-2023, we have observed Spamouflage accounts increasingly seed and amplify content denigrating U.S. election candidates, sowing doubt in the legitimacy of the U.S. electoral process, and spreading divisive narratives about sensitive social issues including gun control, homelessness, drug abuse, racial inequality, and the Israel-Hamas conflict. This content, some of which was almost certainly AI-generated, has targeted President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump, and, more recently, Vice President Kamala Harris.
- In addition to this shift in content, since mid-2023, Spamouflage has expanded its use of inauthentic online personas that impersonate U.S. voters or U.S.-based social media users. This activity is just a fraction of the larger Spamouflage network but is distinct from the operation's typical use of low-quality inauthentic accounts with generic and thinly developed personas.

Our findings corroborate and build on research ISD [published](#) in April 2024, which documented a set of four Spamouflage accounts on X posing as supporters of Trump and the MAGA movement. While we note similarities between these “MAGAflage” accounts and the activity discussed in this report, we currently view them as adjacent but separate clusters based on the following observations:

- The “MAGAflage” accounts ISD identified target audiences supporting Trump, while the larger set of accounts we observed target a broader range of U.S. audiences with content emphasizing patriotism and national pride over political personalities.
- The accounts described in this report sometimes posted pro-Trump content but also criticized the former president and, with one exception, did not explicitly assume or reference a “MAGA” identity.
- While the persona and accounts we identified engaged with pro-Trump and conservative-aligned narratives, their activity appears to be more representative of wider Spamouflage efforts to exacerbate U.S. social divisions and portray the U.S. as a declining global power with weak leaders.



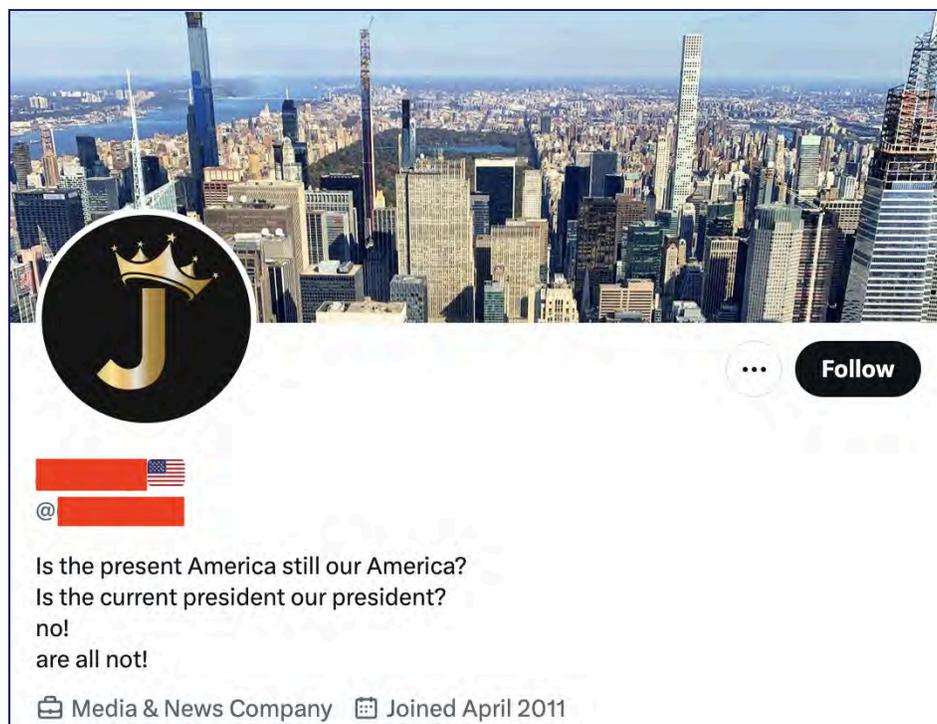
Spamouflage accounts on several platforms have increasingly spread videos, memes, and other content attempting to discredit U.S. President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump. For example, we observed Spamouflage accounts spreading this image portraying U.S. radio host Lenard McKelvey, known professionally as Charlamagne the God, thinking of Trump as a “fraud” and Biden as a “coward.”

Observations & Analysis

We identified 15 Spamouflage accounts on X and one account on TikTok claiming to be U.S. citizens and/or U.S.-focused peace, human rights, and information integrity advocates frustrated by American politics and the West. We also identified a cross-platform Spamouflage persona purporting to be a U.S.-focused news outlet. This persona comprised accounts on TikTok and X and a now-suspended Instagram account and YouTube channel.

While Spamouflage accounts typically post videos and cartoons with distinct visual indicators, these accounts frequently amplified organic content from authentic users, including anti-establishment influencers and Trump supporters. Often, these accounts criticized Biden and the U.S. over sensitive U.S. social and political issues, such as U.S. policy toward Israel over the Israel-Hamas conflict. A smaller number of posts also criticized Trump and the Republican Party, indicating the actors did not intend to promote a specific presidential candidate but rather disparage U.S. politicians more broadly.

Many of the accounts' bios suggested the U.S. is deteriorating and filled with discrimination. For example, some posed rhetorical questions with awkward grammar, such as "is the present America still our America?" or "is the current president our president?" likely to present themselves as U.S. voters disappointed in the current administration.



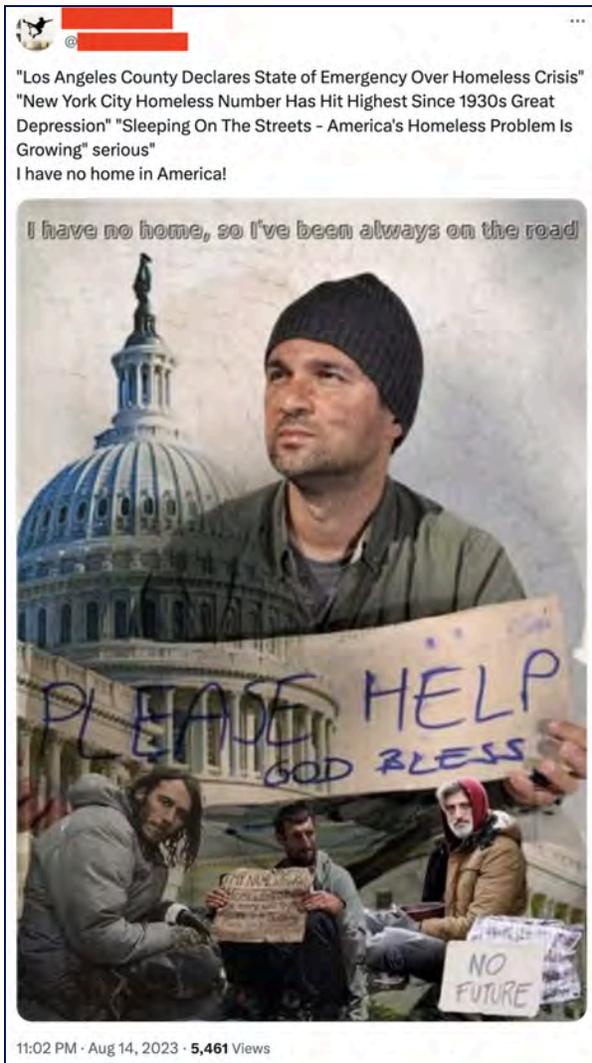
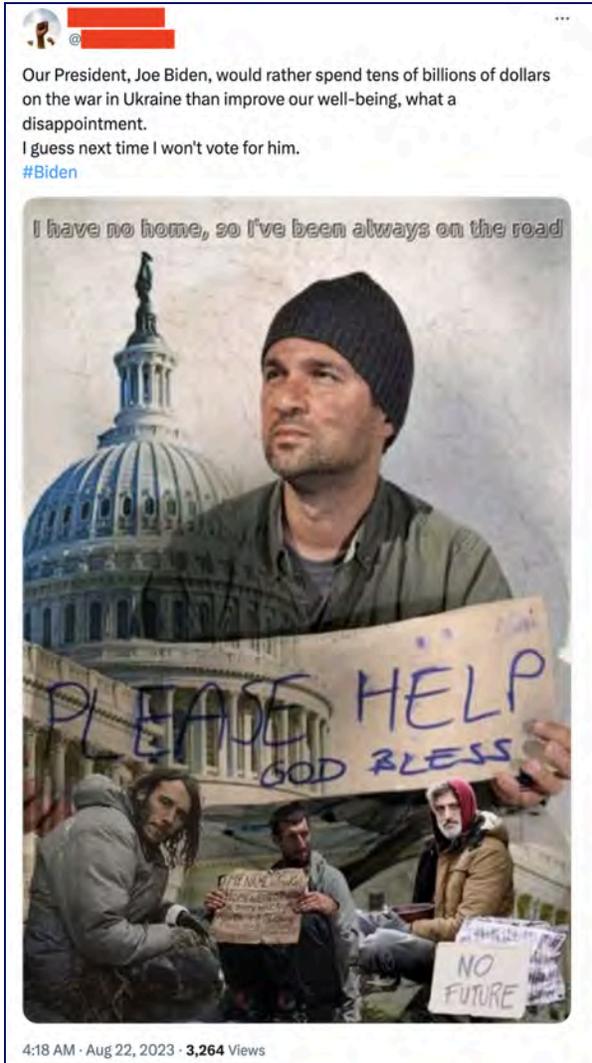
An example of a Spamouflage account on X with a bio that suggests the user is an American frustrated by U.S. politics. Redactions added by Graphika.

'I am an American'

The accounts we identified attempted to pose as U.S. patriots and/or rights defenders by using relevant symbols, including images of U.S. flags and soldiers, in their bios, usernames, and profile pictures. They repeatedly used #American and other U.S.-related hashtags in their posts. At least five accounts explicitly stated that they were American voters, soldiers, or someone who “love(s) America” but had supposedly become disappointed at the U.S. government and the current administration. One account vowed that they wouldn't vote for Biden. Another pretended to be a person residing in a U.S. state that allowed abortion who worried about women in other states “denied their reproductive rights.”



Example of a Spamouflage account on X that explicitly claimed to be “an American” in a post criticizing NATO and the U.S. government. Redactions added by Graphika.



Examples of two Spamouflage accounts on X using the same meme to promote narratives about homelessness in the U.S. One account (left) referred to President Joe Biden as "our president" and claimed that they "won't vote for him" next time. The other (right) stated, "I have no home in America!" Redactions added by Graphika.

These accounts made various attempts to appear as authentic persons, such as attempting to explain lapses in posting activity. In one instance, an X account that purported to be an anti-war activist stopped posting between May 27 and June 17, 2023. On June 18, 2023, the X account resumed its posting activity and claimed that they were suffering from a "depression relapse" and "followed the doctor's advice and went out to relax."



A Spamouflage account on X that purported to be an anti-war activist explained a lapse in posting activity by claiming they were following a doctor's advice to treat depression. Redactions added by Graphika.

Despite these efforts, the accounts all bore hallmarks of Spamouflage activity.

- The accounts used personas that we assess are almost certainly inauthentic, based on discrepancies in their bios, use of stock images as profile pictures, their posting activity, and other indicators.
- The accounts engaged in coordinated amplification, resharing the same posts and content from each other and the wider Spamouflage network. This included coordinated posting with Spamouflage assets on other platforms.
- The accounts seeded and amplified cartoons and videos that researchers at [Graphika](#), [ISD](#), [Microsoft](#), and [Recorded Future](#) have independently identified as Spamouflage content.

We also observed limited instances of accounts posting in Chinese, with signs this activity was unintentional. For example, an account on X that claimed to be a journalism student with “no home in America” published a Chinese-language post that read “水电费水电费” [hydro bill hydro bill] on July 20, 2023. The post was subsequently deleted.

On another occasion, a persona on X identifying as an anti-war activist posted a link to an [X community](#) with the Chinese language caption “看看我创建的社群:” [Check out the community I created:]. Based on a [review](#) of X platform features, this post was very likely automatically generated when the account operator selected the “Post your Community” feature, suggesting they were browsing X in Chinese or using an operating system set to Chinese. The community, called “NO WAR,” had 25 members, 11 of which belonged to the set of 15 Spamouflage accounts on X discussed in this report.



A Spamouflage account on X posted a link to an X community with the Chinese language caption “看看我创建的社群:” [Check out the community I created:]. Redactions added by Graphika.

Just a ‘Common Fireman’

In addition to the accounts detailed above, a cross-platform Spamouflage persona called Deep Red [深红], which we have monitored since 2020, has rebranded on X to adopt the persona of a U.S. user posting about the upcoming election. This is the first time we have observed an established Spamouflage persona changing to pose as a U.S. user.

Deep Red typically presents as a “patriotic” pro-China media outlet and posts content with distinctive visual indicators, including a red bird logo with its name in Chinese characters and the English word “sparks,” a likely reference to a [Mao Zedong quote](#). Videos that include the Deep Red logo were among the most frequently shared content Spamouflage accounts posted across Facebook, X, and YouTube in 2021. The persona has previously maintained a presence on

Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, X, and YouTube but currently operates two X accounts and one TikTok account.

Created in March 2023, one of the X accounts previously had the display name 짙은 붉은 [Deep Red] and posted Deep Red-branded content in Korean. In late 2023, however, this account began posting more generic Chinese state-aligned and Spamouflage content in English. The account then changed its name to Common fireman and updated its profile and cover images to pictures of the U.S. flag. Since then, it has posted almost exclusively about U.S. political issues, sharing screenshots and text taken from authentic U.S. media reports about topics including the risk of violent threats against U.S. election officials, health worker strikes, and the U.S. ban on TikTok.

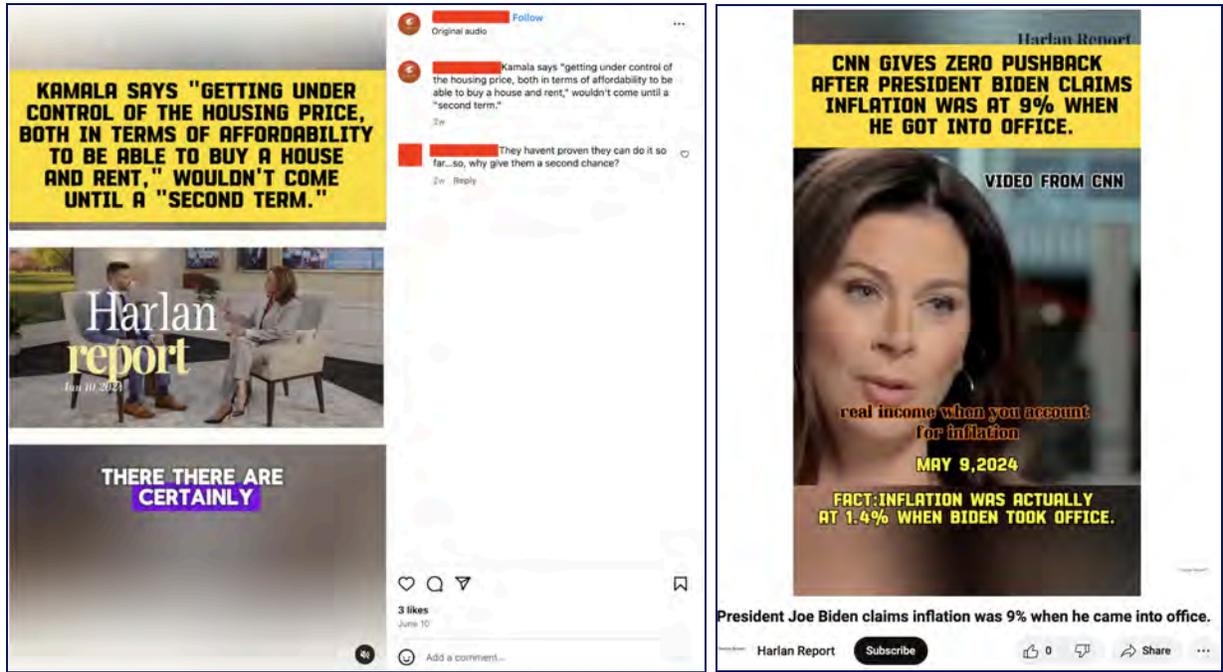


This X account previously used the display name 짙은 붉은 [Deep Red] and posted Deep Red-branded content in Korean (left) but in late 2023 adopted the persona of a U.S. user with the display name Common fireman (right). Redactions added by Graphika.

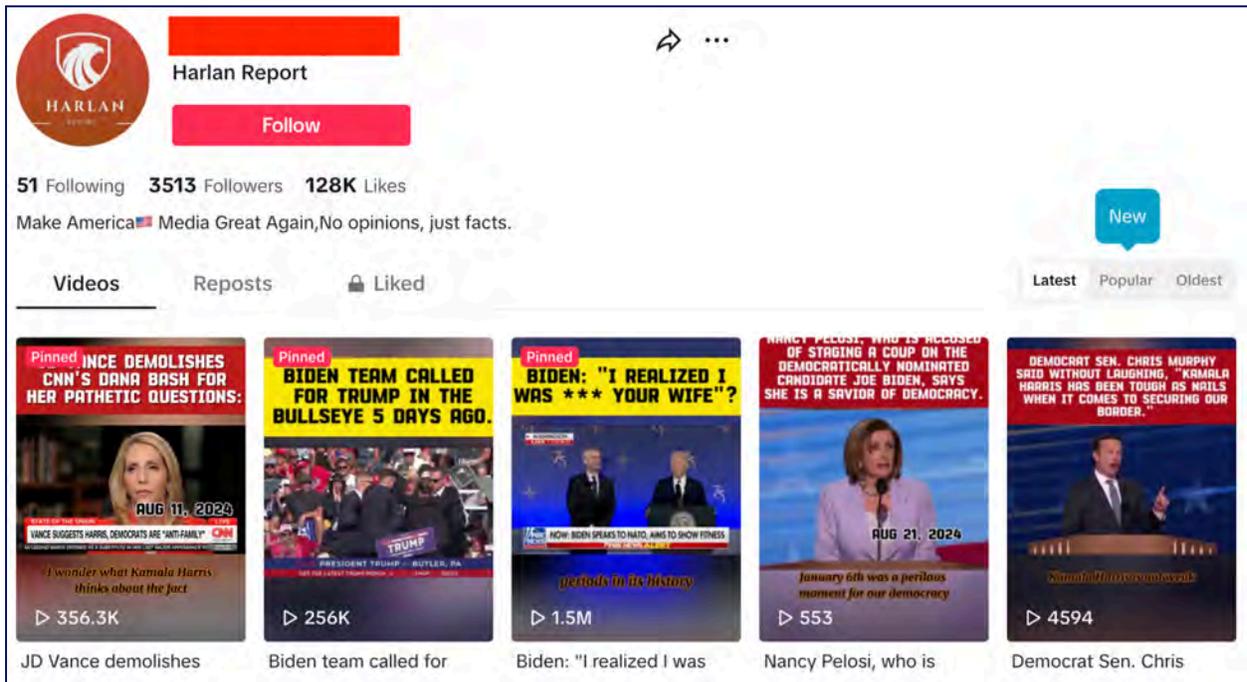
Stolen Valor and a 'Pure Patriotic Girl'

Lastly, we identified a cross-platform persona that purports to be a U.S. conservative news outlet and social media influencer. The Harlan Report persona operates accounts on TikTok and X, and previously ran a now-removed Instagram account and YouTube channel. It primarily amplifies content supporting Trump and the MAGA movement while denigrating Biden, particularly over his age and health. The Harlan Report TikTok account garnered significant views for several videos, including one pinned video mocking Biden with 1.5 million views.

Across platforms, Harlan Report's videos are typically short-form and portrait-oriented, repurposing news footage from legitimate U.S. media outlets. The footage is often overlaid with a short sentence in capitalized, black letters against a bright yellow background at the top of the video. More recently, since late July 2024, Harlan Report has started using white letters against a burgundy background. Some of these videos are branded with the persona's name and logo, likely in an effort to present as a legitimate media outlet.



The Harlan Report persona posts portrait-oriented videos with a distinctive template across its social media accounts. Some of these videos are branded with the persona's name and logo, likely in an effort to present as a legitimate media outlet. Redactions added by Graphika.



Pinned videos on Harlan Report's TikTok account attracted significantly more views than typical Spamouflage accounts. Redactions added by Graphika.

Over the past 15 months, the persona has used multiple identities, deleted past posts on X, and leveraged an AI-generated avatar as part of efforts we assess were very likely intended to obfuscate its past activity and links to the Spamouflage operation.

Reinvention of the persona: Harlan Report has assumed different guises on its X account. Under the handle @HarlanManning19 and username “Warrior Harlan🇺🇸,” the account originally posed as a New York-based U.S. military veteran critical of Biden and supportive of the MAGA movement. Between Nov. 14 and Dec. 15, 2023, it changed its handle to @Harlan_RNC and took on the persona of a 29-year-old Trump supporter with the screen name “Biden Hamas™🇺🇸.” Most recently, it has adopted the identity of a 31-year-old Republican social media influencer in Florida posting under the name “Harlan Report™🇺🇸.”



The three iterations of the Spamouflage X account as “Warrior Harlan🇺🇸” (top left), “Biden Hamas™🇺🇸” (top right), and finally “Harlan Report™🇺🇸”

Deleting old posts: While using the @Harlan_RNC username, the X account deleted a series of past posts, including one containing a cartoon criticizing Chinese virologist Yan Limeng that has [previously](#) been seeded and promoted by the wider Spamouflage network. The account posted this cartoon in June 2023 under the username @HarlanManning19. Yan Limeng is one of Spamouflage’s most frequent and consistent targets.



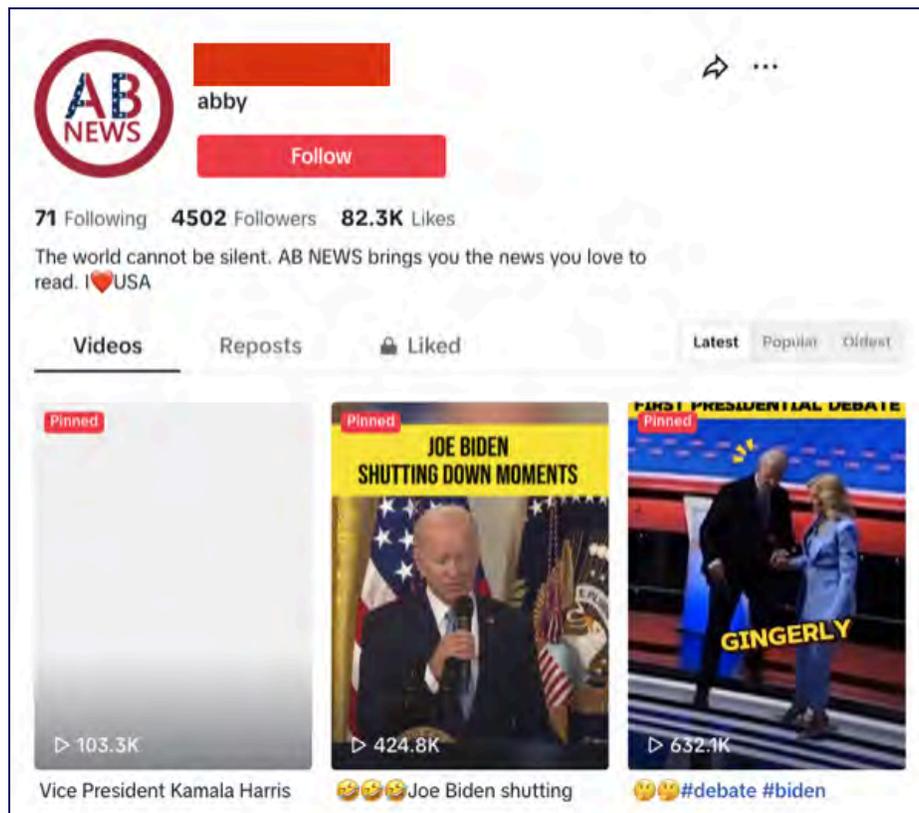
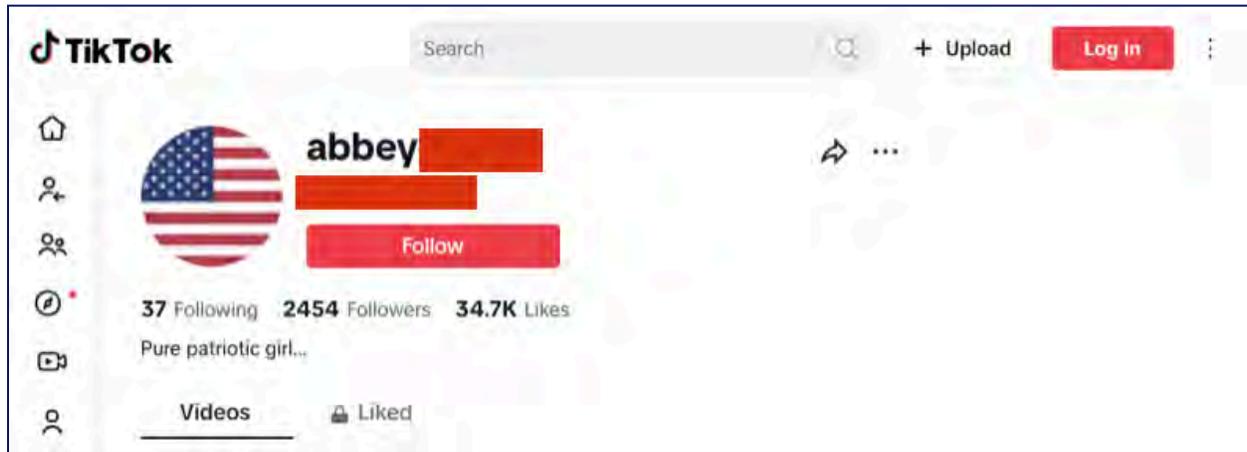
The Harlan Report persona posted a cartoon targeting Chinese virologist Yan Limeng under the @HarlanManning19 handle on X. The account later deleted this post after changing to the @Harlan_RNC handle.

Recycling of likely AI-generated avatars from Spamouflage videos: Before using the “Harlan Report” logos on its accounts, the persona used a likely AI-generated avatar as its profile picture on X. We previously [observed](#) a Spamouflage-linked video targeting Biden using the same avatar.



The @Harlan_RNC X account previously used the same likely AI-generated avatar (left) featured in a Spamouflage-linked video (right).

AB NEWS: While using the @Harlan_RNC handle, the Harlan Report account on X linked to a TikTok account presenting as an American “pure patriotic girl” called “Abbey.” The TikTok account later adopted the persona of Abby News, a purported media outlet whose bio states, “The world cannot be silent. AB NEWS brings you the news you love to read. I ❤️ USA.” Based on open-source indicators, Graphika was not able to assess with high confidence whether the Abby News account is part of the Spamuflage operation. However, we note that it has previously engaged in coordinated posting with the Harlan Report persona. In some cases, both personas have posted identical or near-identical copies of the same videos within hours of each other.



The TikTok account identified as an American “pure patriotic girl” called “Abbey” (top) before adopting the persona of a purported media outlet called Abby News (bottom). Redactions added by Graphika.

Estimative Language Legend

Assessments of Likelihood

Graphika uses the following vocabulary to indicate the likelihood of a hypothesis proving correct. If we are unable to assess likelihood due to limited or non-existent information, we may use terms such as “suggest.”

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Real Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain(ly)
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

Confidence Levels: Indicators of Sourcing and Corroboration

Graphika uses confidence levels to indicate the quality of information, sources, and corroboration underpinning our assessments.

Low Confidence	Medium Confidence	High Confidence
Assessment based on information from a non-trusted source and/or information we have not been able to independently corroborate.	Assessment based on information that we are unable to sufficiently corroborate and/or information open to multiple interpretations.	Assessment based on information from multiple trusted sources that we are able to fully corroborate.

Graphika

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