Twitter Thread by Kate Starbird

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Let’s talk about how the attempted take-over of the US Capitol came to pass. For months leading up to the general election, Pres. Trump sowed the seeds of doubt in the election, repeatedly tweeting that it would be “rigged”. (Thread)

Hyper-partisan right wing media and social media influencers cultivated that doubt. They amplified his rigged claims, and combed the internet for stories that they could fit into their developing theories of voter fraud.

Ballots from 2018 round in a recycling bin? Fraud! Ballots accidentally discarded in a trash can? Fraud! An information card mailed to an old address in CA (mislabeled as a “ballot”)? Fraud!

This started in September and continues today.

If you look closely, you can see the same set of actors mobilizing again and again and again to spread these false claims. From accounts affiliated with right wing media and right wing political organizations to members of Trump’s inner circle. And of course, the Pres. himself.

Here’s a table we generated from months of work at the @2020Partnership of false/misleading information “incidents” on Twitter, from August through November:

@2020Partnership We did see some false claims about election procedures spread left-leaning networks, but when we look at the accounts that REPEATEDLY spread false claims about the election — primarily around “voter fraud” — these were overwhelming RW influencers & most were blue-check (verified)

Going into the election, Trump and his close associates, including his adult sons (who eventually helped spread >20 false narratives), called for an “Army for Trump” to go to the polls and gather evidence of the voter fraud he told them to look for. And so they did.

Republican lawmakers in battleground states had ensured that the mail-in votes (which leaned heavily Dem b/c Trump told his followers they weren’t safe) would be counted after the polls closed… which set the stage for a period of uncertainty and shifting vote counts.

In the days after the election, Trump and his supporters in right wing media and on social media leveraged that uncertainty and shifting vote counts (the blue wave) to feed their efforts to assemble “evidence” of voter fraud.

They collaborated with their online audiences to craft conspiracy theories of mass voter fraud, weaving together — from the great stores of social media content — a number of misinterpretations, figments of imaginations, and outright fabrications of alleged fraud.

They — Trump and his collaborators — then took these conspiracy theories to court, to try to contest the election, where they were thrown out time and time again, as baseless, unfounded, and in many cases the work of charlatans.

When they couldn’t get support for their reality from the courts, they took a final desperate tact.

On Jan 6, we saw a crowd of hashtag-Patriot accounts, motivated by manufactured grievance, attempt a violent take-over of the U.S. Capitol to stop Pres. Trump’s “sacred landslide victory” from being stolen by “evil” people. Online conspiracy theories manifesting in insurrection.