

Gaming and Extremism

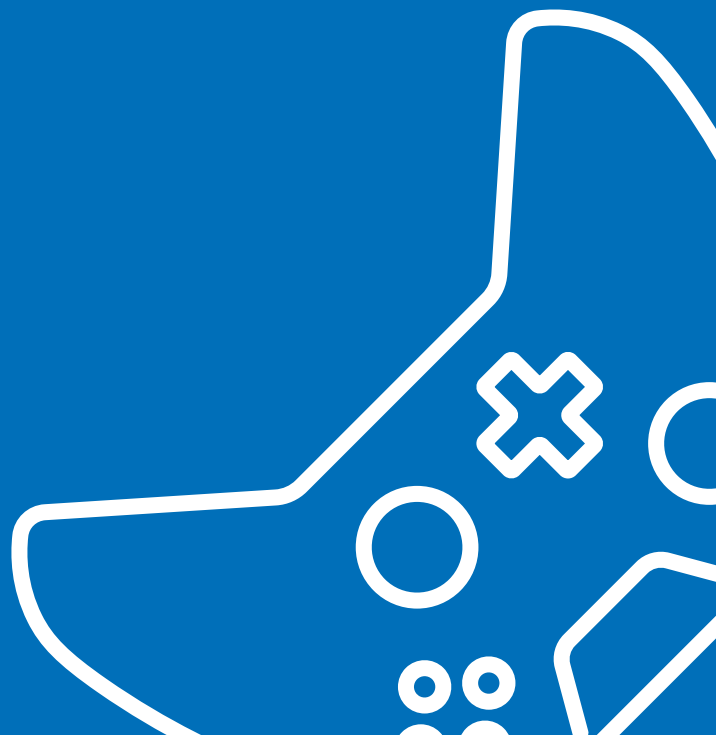
# The Extreme Right on Twitch

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#### About the series

This briefing is part of ISD's Gaming and Extremism Series exploring the role online gaming plays in the strategy of far-right extremists in the UK and globally. This is part of a broader programme on the 'Future of Extremism' being delivered by ISD in the second half of 2021, charting the transformational shifts in the extremist threat landscape two decades on from 9/11, and the policy strategies required to counter the next generation of extremist threats. It provides a snapshot overview of the extreme right's use of Twitch.



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## Executive summary

**Twitch launched as a livestreaming service in 2011 focused on gaming and eSports and was acquired by Amazon in August 2014 for \$970 million.<sup>1</sup> According to Twitch, the platform has over 30 million average daily visitors and almost half of all Twitch users are between 18 - 34 years old, while 21% are between 13 - 17.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, based on the most recent Ofcom figures from 2019, Twitch accounts were held by 8% of 16-24 year olds, 3% of 25-34 year olds and 2% of 35-44 year olds.<sup>3</sup>**

Users typically stream themselves playing a game and others can tune in to watch or interact with the gamer through the in-app chat function, whereby a gamer will respond to text questions via their microphone, or to users who send voice comments via a connected chat channel set up by the host gamer on another messaging platform like Discord.

There are several ways for Twitch users to monetize their content, most of which are supported and facilitated by the platform. This includes donations sent using the platform's digital currency, Bits, or via a third-party donations tool like Streamlabs, or via a payment platform like Paypal. Additionally, users earn revenue by running ads on their content or channel, paid subscriptions from other Twitch users (followers), or sponsorships and selling merchandise.

Extremist activists have used Twitch in the past to livestream. The platform hosted numerous streams, primarily rebroadcasts or livestreams from other platforms, showing events inside the US Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January as protesters stormed the Capitol.<sup>4</sup> In response to extremist threats in the past, Twitch has instituted an in-house moderation team, which suspend or remove channels which breach their rules.<sup>5</sup>

Twitch has also been used to promote extremist ideologies and broadcast terrorist attacks. In October 2019, a man killed two people during an attempted attack on a synagogue in Halle.<sup>6</sup> The attack was livestreamed for 25 minutes on Twitch. According to the platform, only five viewers watched the video while it was live while a recording of the video generated automatically after the stream ended was viewed by 2,200 people in the 30 minutes it was available before it was flagged and removed.<sup>7</sup> The Twitch account used

to broadcast the attack was created about two months prior to the attack and had attempted to stream only once before.

In October 2020, Twitch updated its community guidelines to clarify and broaden its ban on terrorist and extremist content.<sup>8</sup> Twitch does not allow content "that depicts, glorifies, encourages, or supports terrorism, or violent extremist actors or acts," while additionally, users may not display footage of terrorist or extremist violence "even for the purposes of denouncing such content." In March 2021, Twitch released its first-ever transparency report, detailing its safety initiatives and efforts to protect users on the platform.<sup>9</sup>

To better understand the current use of Twitch by the extreme right, and to analyse the overlap with gaming we performed scoping analysis of the platform by searching the platform for keywords associated with extremist activity with the aim of identifying extremist accounts and content. In total we analysed 73 videos and 91 channels on the platform.

### Key findings

- We discovered that content which expresses support for extreme right wing ideologies can be discovered on Twitch with relative ease. These videos are probably better considered as sporadic examples of support for these ideologies on the platform, rather than representative of the systemic use of Twitch by the extreme right for radicalisation and coordination. However, this nevertheless demonstrates that the platform still has a problem with extremist activity. ISD also discovered that there are, and have recently been, prominent extreme right-wing content creators active on the platform, but that these appear to be low in number.
- Twitch is one of many livestreaming platforms that are favoured by extremists in the practice of "Omegle Redpilling." This practice involves extremists using the live video chat platform Omegle to troll and spew racism towards others, whilst simultaneously livestreaming themselves to their own followers on their profile on another livestream platform. ISD found evidence of at least two such online extremists who have used Twitch for these purposes.

- Extreme right-wing activists are platform agnostic. Based on findings in this and other reports in this ISD series, there is growing evidence that points to extreme right-activists online adopting a multi-platform approach, where they use as many platforms as possible as part of a strategy to avoid moderation efforts.
- A Twitch account belonging to jailed white supremacist Paul Miller is still live. ISD discovered that a Twitch account run by Paul Miller, a white supremacist who used multiple Twitch accounts to simultaneously broadcast hate on multiple video platforms, is still live. Though it features no content, it continues to grow in subscribers and serves as a promotional page for Miller and his hateful ideology.
- Streams of gaming did not appear to be used systemically to target, groom or recruit individuals on the platform. ISD did not find evidence that gaming content or communities on Twitch are routinely used or targeted, groomed or recruited by extremists.
- We discovered that counter-speech content which pushes back against the extreme right is widely accessible on Twitch. Counter-speech is term for a tactic used by individuals and groups online in countering hate speech, extremism or misinformation by presenting critical responses, debates or alternative narratives in reaction to offensive narratives. ISD discovered there is an active anti-extremist progressive community of counter-speech channels on the platform.
- Compared to other online platforms analysed in other reports in this series Twitch does not appear to be a major hub for extreme right-wing communities, content creators or organisations. Notwithstanding some high profile examples of extremist trolling, these appear to be isolated rather than evidence of systemic extremist mobilisation on the platform to reach large audiences, incite violence or recruit others.



## Findings of Analysis

### Extreme Right-Wing Content - Less Influencers, More Isolated Clips

The majority of extreme right-wing content identified in this analysis did not feature any gaming-related content (see next section for content related to gaming). Additionally, ISD found limited evidence to suggest extremists have used Twitch to openly recruit others on the platform. There was little to no explicit endorsement of the more egregious elements of extreme right ideologies, like accelerationism, threats of violence or murder, or advocating for genocide, but there were regular references to extremist conspiracies, extremist trolling, the use of hate speech, promotion of extremist actors and framing of current events through a ethno-nationalist lens.

Using relevant keywords, it is relatively easy to discover content on Twitch that espouses extreme right-wing talking points. By searching for extremist keywords, we found examples of content that promotes, discusses positively and or mentions uncritically concepts like the Great Replacement theory. ISD discovered four videos advocating for extreme misogyny,<sup>10</sup> content promoting explicitly antisemitic conspiracy theories, and two videos that featured a Bible verse interpreted by the Twitch users to target and criticise race mixing.

Support for white supremacist narratives was observed in four videos, and the “white genocide” conspiracy in another video. We discovered two videos that expressed support for a prominent British far-right activist and four videos that featured commentary from or expressed support for the leader of a white nationalist movement in the US.

We also uncovered the presence of high profile extreme right-wing figures active on Twitch. ISD found 7 videos on a Twitch channel run by one specific white supremacist, stretching back to roughly two weeks prior to the time of writing, though it’s likely this channel has been in use for far longer than this.

The figure uses their online presence, including this Twitch account and numerous other accounts on other platforms, to raise awareness of supposed “anti-whiteness.” Interestingly, they appear to use Twitch as part of a multi-platform broadcast network that allows them to simultaneously livestream their videos on numerous livestreaming platforms at once.

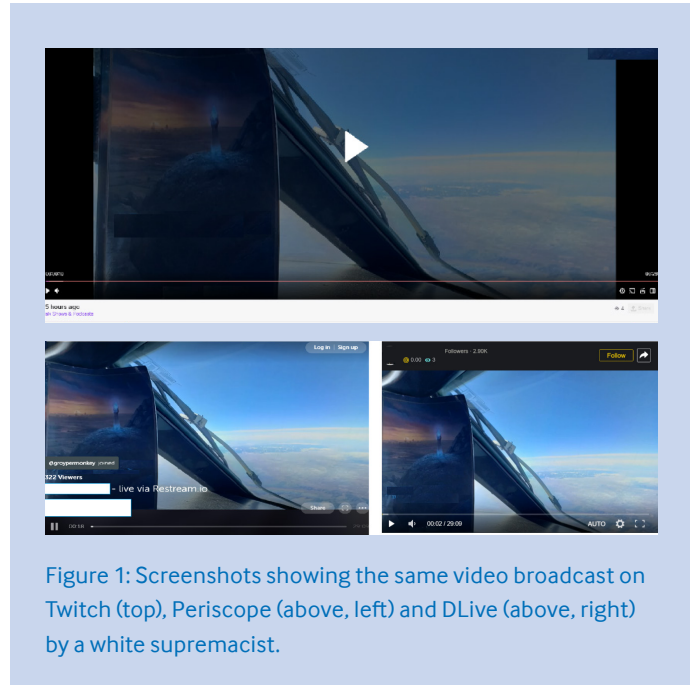


Figure 1: Screenshots showing the same video broadcast on Twitch (top), Periscope (above, left) and DLive (above, right) by a white supremacist.

Twitch appears to be low on the list of their best-performing social platforms. Compared to their other platforms that mostly have over one thousand followers, they have less than 100 followers on Twitch.

### Gaming Content

13 videos examined were found to feature video game content in the form of full-length livestreams or shorter highlight clips. Of these 13 videos, 12 featured positive commentary or support for extreme right-wing ideologies, while one video featured a Twitch user, who frequently publishes videos discussing socialism and left-wing politics, playing a video game and pausing it to criticise extreme right-wing communities demonising black people.

Of the 12 gaming related videos featuring support for extreme right wing ideology, 7 were standalone videos referencing one of the keywords ISD examined on Twitch. These videos typically feature a Twitch user playing a video game as they speak over the stream touting a political perspective. A notable example can be seen in one such Twitch broadcast from by a user in March 2021. In the video, the user plays the video game Monhun while the audio of a white nationalist speech plays throughout, and the Twitch user and another person can be heard reacting to the audio in real time.

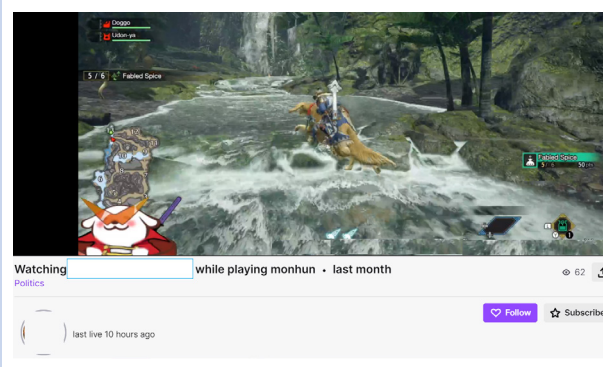


Figure 2 Screenshot showing Twitch video game footage as audio featuring of a white nationalist plays over stream.

The remaining 5 videos analysed by ISD that featured gaming content all originated from the same channel used by a pair of US white nationalist streamers who always appear together. Their videos are all full-length livestreams averaging over two hours in length. From a review of this content, these white nationalist streamers appeared to primarily discuss the game they were playing on a given stream and did not use the broadcast to explicitly promote extreme right-wing ideologies.

Both of these white nationalist streamers have stated they are increasingly interested in Odysee for streaming options, so it is possible that they view platforms with less moderation and platform input as a preferable space for extremist discussions as compared to Twitch.

Considering the multi-platform strategy used by one white supremacist in livestreaming simultaneously on multiple platforms and the pair of white nationalists' presence on multiple streaming platforms too, these findings resonate with observations gleaned from other analyses in this series, particularly our report on DLive, that points to extreme right-wing activists being platform agnostic and not dependent on a single platform.

### Counterspeech: Content Critical of Extreme Right-Wing Ideologies

Among the 74 videos examined by ISD as part of our Twitch analysis are 35 videos that can be considered as critical, counterspeech or unsupportive of extreme right-wing ideologies. Based on our analysis, there appears to be an active community of left-wing or progressive Twitch channels that regularly produce content that criticises extreme right-wing topics or figures. Two examples highlighting this type of activity are included here.

One such video coded as critical of extreme right-wing ideologies was a video broadcast on the Twitch channel EchoplexMedia, whose channel description categories it as part of “left-Twitch” or left-wing Twitch channels.<sup>11</sup> The related video was a critique of a conspiracy video that claimed Texas is undergoing a “Great Replacement”, suggesting that white Republican voters are becoming outnumbered by Democrat Party-supporting people of colour.

One video coded as featuring content that commented on extreme right-wing ideologies, was a video broadcast by the verified Twitch channel The Serfs, which is the name of two content creators who discuss news and politics from a left-wing perspective and have large audiences on other video platforms like YouTube.<sup>12</sup> This video in particular concerned reviewing and discussing a political debate that took place on YouTube between a white nationalist and self-described “leftist” YouTuber.<sup>13</sup> Numerous other Twitch videos captured in our analysis discussed this debate, all through a left-wing lens that largely criticised the white nationalist’s viewpoints and wider white nationalist ideologies.

Lastly, the video coded by ISD as featuring content that reported on extreme right-wing ideologies in a news format was a broadcast from the Twitch channel MalcontentTango reporting on the low turnout at white nationalist protests across the US in mid-April.

## Case study

## Paul Miller's Use of Twitch for White Supremacist Trolling

Over the course of our Twitch analysis, ISD examined BitChute and discovered a series of videos, originally posted on Twitch, that showed Paul Miller, a New Jersey and Florida-based Twitch user who used the platform to simultaneously broadcast himself on Twitch and Chatroulette or Omegle. The former are video chat platforms that randomly pairs users for chat sessions, which Miller used to target others with racist, antisemitic, hate-filled slurs, which he streamed, at the same time, to his Twitch followers.

Miller, already a convicted felon over a 2007 charge,<sup>14</sup> was arrested in Florida in March 2021 on a firearm charge. In June, Miller took a plea deal and pleaded guilty to three firearm charges. The details of the plea deal are not known, but Miller faces a possible 30 years in prison.<sup>15</sup> Miller, who calls himself the Gypsy Crusader, is described by the Anti-Defamation League<sup>16</sup> as a “white supremacist accelerationist.” During his livestreams, Miller typically wore military fatigues, a skull face mask modelled on Marvel Comics character The Punisher (commonly worn by white supremacists), sunglasses, and fastened a hunting knife to his chest with which he frequently made threatening gestures as he sat in front of a Confederate flag with additional Celtic crosses behind him, a white supremacist symbol.<sup>17</sup> During one Twitch video, since removed from the platform but re-uploaded on Bitchute and analysed by ISD, Miller said he was going to “fuck around” on Chatroulette and proceeded to open new video chats with strangers. Miller typically opened by asking someone if they were a Jewish person and then used various slur words for Jewish people or other terms if the person was not white. At one stage, Miller opened a new video chat and, by chance, met another white supremacist engaging in the same activity. They both denigrated Jewish people, agreed that there will be a race war or conflict in the next

10-20 years in the US and debated the 2020 US presidential election.

Miller's stream continued undisturbed for 72 minutes, as other Twitch users in the chat window encouraged him to use more offensive slurs against Jewish and Black people, until the video froze and Miller said that he believed he had just been banned by Twitch. On a linked Telegram channel run by Miller, he previously said he was banned twice on Twitch. On Telegram, Miller linked to another channel on Twitch that bears his Gypsy Crusader logos that is still live at the time of writing. The channel has 4,000 followers but does not feature any content. There are no signs that suggest Miller ever used Twitch to broadcast gaming content and the channel was used exclusively to spread hate.

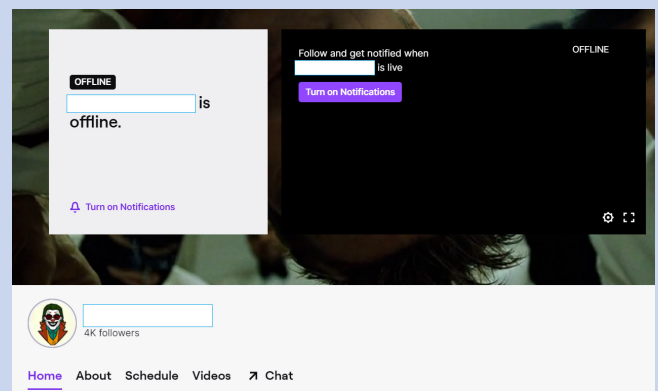


Figure 3: Screenshot showing a Twitch channel for Miller, advertised on a Telegram-channel run by Miller, that is still live.

Since the ability to broadcast live video became possible online, extremists have used the technology in various ways to produce and promote hatred, from livestreaming the harassment and intimidation of others, especially minorities, to broadcasting terrorist attacks in real time. Anti-hate advocacy



groups like the ADL<sup>18</sup> and Anti-Hate Canada<sup>19</sup> have tracked how other white supremacists used simultaneous livestreams to offend and harass others online in a tactic referred to as “Omegle Redpilling,” according to the ADL.

The motivations for extremist here is to offend as many people as possible, perform for their followers and create clips that can be shared after the livestream has ended as a growth strategy to widen their audience. Arguably, the post-broadcast clips perform better and receive more views than the livestreams with this content serving as fodder for the broader online white supremacist movement. The simultaneous use of multiple livestreams to spread hate, by verbally attacking or harassing people in one forum and broadcasting it to a supportive audience in another forum, represents a new arena favoured by extremists online as they seek new ways to further their movement.

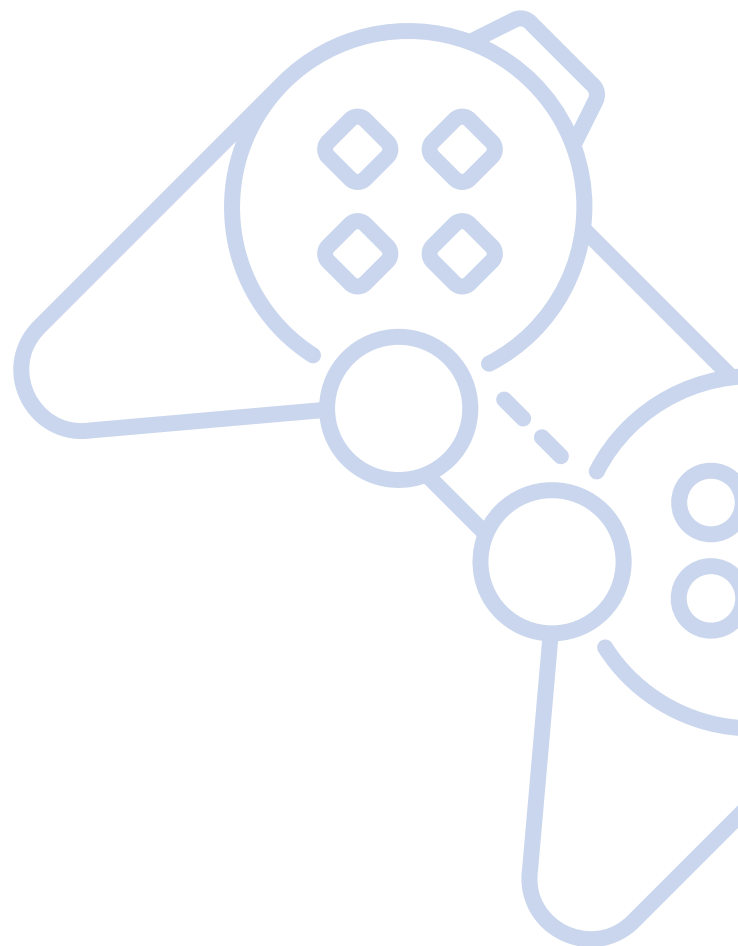
## Conclusion

**We were able to discover content and actors on Twitch that promote extremist right-wing ideologies with few difficulties. However, through this process we found limited evidence that there is a large community of content creators espousing these ideologies on Twitch, suggesting extremist use of the platform is not currently endemic.**

We also did not discover evidence that suggests that gaming content or communities are being systematically used or targeted, groomed or recruited by extreme right-wing actors or organisations through the platform. However, as our analysis focussed primarily on identifying extremist activity it remains possible that gaming streamers who do not overtly affiliate with the extreme right are using their platform to espouse extremist talking points.

Every platform is open to questions on the speed, implementation, or efficacy of its content moderation guidelines against offensive or incendiary activity. Our analysis would suggest that whilst Twitch's enforcement efforts have not succeeded in ridding the platform of content which breaches their terms of service, the platform's efforts may be having impact on limiting key influencers.

The apparent absence of significant clusters of extremist right-wing influencers on the platform is both a potentially positive conclusion but also a cause for future research. Radical and extremist groups in the UK and internationally have been found on all major social and online platforms in recent years so it's likely there are such extremists who do use Twitch which were not captured in this scoping research. As noted above, prior to livestreaming a terrorist attack in Halle, Germany, the Twitch user had only gone live one time before this event, raising few red flags on their future intention to place the platform at the centre of a terrorist attack. How extremists may try to build a profile on the platform, interact with other users or use the site to promulgate extremist ideologies or promote terrorist attacks is an area that will require regular monitoring and deeper analysis.



## Methodology

**To source and analyse the nature and scale of extreme right-wing content on Twitch, ISD used a mixture of search techniques to source relevant material on the platform. ISD developed a seed list of keywords related to extreme right-wing ideologies, including references to known white nationalist, white supremacist or Nazi conspiracies, slogans and groups, and the names of figures active in these communities currently or in the past, in the UK and internationally.**

ISD searched for videos on Twitch using these keywords and discovered 73 videos, though as noted in a later section, not all content posted using these terms was supportive of these extremist ideologies or related to gaming. ISD also searched for channels bearing these keywords in their names and found 91 channels, yet all but 5 had zero followers and no public signs of activity.

Conducting open-source research on Twitch has its own limitations. It is not possible to examine a user's followers, which is usually a helpful snowball method of finding additional accounts when you discover an account of note. Twitch users can integrate their accounts on other social platforms into their Twitch account, but this is opt-in and the majority of accounts discovered and analysed in this research do not link to any other platforms.

Additionally, although Twitch offers users the option to save their livestreams, this is opt-in, and accordingly videos are liable to vanish from the platform. Broadcasts on Twitch can be any length, with many livestreams stretching to hours. Due to this, a full content analysis of the material present in each video was not always feasible. Where possible, ISD examined snippets of each video or related Twitch account, or linked accounts on other social platforms, to the point where we felt confident at determining the nature of the content shared.

Due to the limitations noted above and lack of notable accounts discovered on Twitch, ISD conducted searches on other platforms to further examine the presence of extreme right-wing accounts on Twitch. ISD analysed Telegram, Reddit and Twitter data gathered from extreme right wing accounts and channels to search for information that might point towards Twitch accounts or content of interest, but did not find any such information.

ISD also examined BitChute, a video platform with minimal content moderation and a known haven for extremist material for reposted Twitch videos highlighting extreme right-wing activity that may have been removed from Twitch.



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