

Cash for Comments

How YouTube's Super Chats Tool Enables the Platform
and its Creators to Profit from Live Chat Feeds Promoting
Violence, Conspiracies, Misinformation and Hate

About this paper

This report features research examining the use and misuse of YouTube Super Chats, a tool that allows creators to monetise comments in their livestream chat feeds. Drawing on three case studies featuring popular political commentary and content channels on the platform, this report highlights how this tool is an important source of revenue for both creators and YouTube but, at the same time, also enables creators and YouTube to profit from comments that promote violence, conspiracy theories, misinformation and hate. The report highlights YouTube's failure to effectively enforce its own community guidelines on Super Chats and includes recommendations on how the platform can address this enforcement gap.

About ISD

Founded in 2006, ISD is now the leading global 'think and do' tank dedicated to understanding and innovating real-world responses to the rising tide of disinformation, polarisation, hate and extremism of all forms. We combine ethnographic research, expertise in international extremist movements and an advanced digital analysis capability that tracks hate, disinformation and extremism online, with policy advisory support and training to governments and cities around the world. We also work to empower youth and community influencers internationally through our pioneering education, technology and communications programmes.

About the Author

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Powering solutions
to extremism, hate
and disinformation

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Executive Summary

YouTube's Super Chat tool allows YouTube channel owners and the platform itself to profit from content that promotes conspiracy theories, mis- and disinformation, as well as harmful and threatening language - including open calls for violence - that directly violate the platform's Community Guidelines.

Super Chats, launched in January 2017, is a tool that helps YouTube creators (channel owners) to monetize the live chats that accompany their livestreams and enable their viewers to comment in real time and pay to pin and highlight their comments, above other non-monetized comments, on the host's live chat feed during livestream videos.¹

This report features three case studies, each focusing on a different YouTube channel: Timcast IRL; Right Side Broadcasting Network; and The Young Turks. These channels were chosen as case studies as they are among the most popular channels on the platform that regularly feature coverage of US politics and reflect varying political perspectives. They also illustrate how Super Chats are used in various ways on popular YouTube channels and how they often violate the platform's guidelines on harmful or dangerous content, harassment and cyberbullying, electoral misinformation or COVID-19 medical misinformation, without consequence.

This content serves as a source of revenue for influential creators on the platform, as well as YouTube itself. In many instances, the same false claims analyzed in this report have also been the subject of fact checks from news organizations. All Super Chat comments highlighted throughout this report remain live at the time of writing.

Super Chats are an increasingly important source of revenue for both creators and YouTube. In one case study featured in this report, 100 videos broadcast on Timcast IRL - a channel run by podcast host and political commentator Tim Pool - resulted in over 13,000 paid Super Chat comments. These comments equate to \$219,416, paid to the channel from users around the world in over 30 currencies, split 70/30 between channel and platform, as per YouTube's policies on sharing revenues from Super Chat monetization.

The findings of this analysis highlight that there is a particularly stark enforcement gap on YouTube when it comes to Super Chats. While YouTube has developed nuanced policies designed to prohibit harmful or misleading content, the platform is failing to implement these policies across Super Chats as a feature. This report recommends that YouTube and Google address this gap, in part by requiring, rather than just recommending, that creators who broadcast "high-traffic events" use moderators in live chats. This shift would go some way to ensuring that explicitly violative content is not permitted to act as a source of monetization for creators.

Key Findings

Super Chat comments are used to publish content that violates YouTube’s Community Guidelines. ISD found that, on average across all three case studies featured in this research, 5% of the total sample of paid Super Chat comments contained content that promoted conspiracies, mis- and disinformation, hate speech or threats of violence.

YouTube’s policies are not matched by enforcement of content moderation of live chat comments. Whilst YouTube’s Community Guidelines are detailed, instructional and offer a nuanced understanding of mis/disinformation, conspiracy content and the threat of potentially violent content, this report illustrates that these guidelines are not being enforced consistently or effectively.

Popular YouTube creators are not required to use moderators on live chat feeds. YouTube recommends, but does not require, that creators assign moderators in their live chats, especially for creators who host “high-traffic events.” As illustrated in this report, such “high-traffic” broadcasts can be prime events for harmful and misleading content and YouTube’s decision against requiring in-chat moderators represents a significant failing in safeguarding users.

Super Chats offer creators a significant source of revenue. ISD recorded over \$219,000 in paid Super Chat comments posted on one YouTube channel researched in this report. Across all 210 videos analyzed, the most frequent amount spent on Super Chat comments was \$5, however larger amounts were also common. Eight comments were posted with a \$500 payment; five comments with a \$250 payment; and 21 comments with a \$200 payment.

January 6 catalyzed calls to violence and harassment for numerous YouTube users. ISD observed many paid Super Chat comments, which are still live on YouTube, were posted on live videos related to the protests in Washington DC on January 6, before, during and after the violent events of the day.

YouTube offers no effective data access to research live chat content on its platform. Live, disappearing and other forms of ephemeral or difficult-to-track content are favored by extremists and hostile actors online as a means of publishing harmful or misleading content and escaping content moderation efforts by platforms. There are no analytical tools offered by YouTube, such as an API, to track or analyze live chat content at scale across the platform, meaning such content is outside the scope of most analysis or research.

Channel	Timcast IRL	Right Side Broadcasting	The Young Turks
Videos	100 videos	10 videos	100 videos
Total Super Chat comments	13,839	1,434	1,879
Total Revenue	\$219,416.22	\$23,975.69	\$14,279.57
Channel/Platform split (70/30)			
Channel	\$153,591.35	\$16,782.98	\$9,995.70
Platform (YouTube)	\$65,824.86	\$7,192.71	\$4,283.87
Content featuring or promoting mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories or threats of violence			
Super Chat comments	720	145	42
Revenue	\$11,647.87	\$1,652.75	\$289.03
Channel/Platform split (70/30)			
Channel	\$8,153.50	\$1,156.93	\$202.32
Platform (YouTube)	\$3,494.87	\$495.82	\$86.71

Table 1: Visual summarizing the key findings from each YouTube channel analyzed, including number of videos, total Super Chat comments and revenue, level of conspiracy/misinformation Super Chat comments and revenue, as well as the revenue split between channel and platform

Super Chats

Super Chats offer YouTube creators a way to monetize live comments posted whilst they broadcast live. A comment will stay pinned at the top of the live chat feed for longer depending on the amount of money spent by the viewer. To enable Super Chats, a creator must have monetization features enabled on their channel, the channel owner must be at least 18 years old, and have over 1,000 subscribers.

Revenue figures for how much YouTube earns from Super Chats in total per year are not available online. Alphabet, YouTube's parent company, announced in its 2021 fourth quarter earnings call that revenue from advertising on YouTube was \$8.63 billion. Another revenue segment which includes non-advertising YouTube revenue, of which Super Chat is one component, received \$8.16 billion in sales, up from \$6.67 billion the year prior, highlighting how the revenue from these services is growing.²

Advertising is still pivotal for YouTube's revenue. However, during the earnings call, Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai noted the growing monetization opportunities for users too. In 2021 Pichai said "the number of YouTube channels that made at least \$10,000 in revenue was up more than 40% year over year," adding that "more creators than ever are earning money from our non-ads products like Super Chat".³

YouTube says that video creators receive 70% of Super Chat revenue that is "recognized by Google after local sales tax and applicable App Store fees on iOS are deducted". This effectively means that YouTube earns 30% from every payment and creators earn 70%.⁴ If Super Chats content is "moderated and removed" for violating the platform's Community Guidelines, YouTube says they will donate their portion of revenue to charity. Presumably then, the comments analyzed as part of this research that are still live have either not been subject to moderation by YouTube or deemed not to violate these guidelines.⁵

YouTube "strongly recommend" that creators assign moderators in their live chats for "high-traffic events" but do not explicitly require it.⁶ Moderators can interact with the audience, remove comments as appropriate, and flag, hide or put users in time out and restrict them from commenting for a period of time. Creators can opt in to a setting that asks YouTube to identify

"potentially inappropriate" live chat comments and hold them for review by moderators. Creators can also create a list of "blocked words" that will be blocked for use in live chat comments. ISD observed the use of moderators on some videos in this analysis but this practice was not widespread.

Since the launch of the feature in 2017, Super Chats have been promoted and used by extremists as a source of revenue and potential recruitment on the platform. In December 2017, a trend known as Internet Bloodsports started on YouTube which saw known alt-right figures like Richard Spencer, Baked Alaska (Tim Gionet) and others debate 'contentious' topics like immigration, feminism, racism, nationalism and "race realism"⁷ as viewers watched and posted paid Super Chat comments in support of the most provocative participants with their own comments.⁸

Other reporting has analysed how Super Chats had been used to post paid antisemitic comments following the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shooting in November 2018⁹ as well as after the Christchurch 2019 mosque attacks.¹⁰ Super Chats were also used as a source of financial support for white nationalist Martin Sellner following Christchurch¹¹ and were also used to support a far-right Danish political activist who regularly broadcast himself burning the Quran on YouTube in 2019.¹²

Super Chats represent an under-researched and under-scrutinized element of content monetization and content moderation on YouTube. There are no analytical tools offered by YouTube, such as API access, that can be used by researchers to record or analyze Super Chat comments at scale. Research therefore must be conducted manually to comply with the platform's terms of service. Yet, most livestreams that utilize Super Chats are lengthy broadcasts, making effective research of the feature enormously time and labor intensive and beyond the scope of most research projects.

Methodology

ISD wished to examine the use of Super Chats among popular YouTube channels that regularly broadcast live on the platform and produce content that features discussion, coverage and commentary on political topics and current affairs in the US. ISD chose The Young Turks, Timcast IRL and Right Side Broadcasting Network as these channels each have over one million subscribers, all use the Super Chats tool on their live videos, and regularly feature voices and content capturing different political perspectives.

Video Selection

All three channels broadcast live on YouTube in different ways, meaning the selection process for analysing each channel differed slightly between each case study. This process is outlined in greater detail below.

The Young Turks: The Young Turks (YT) is an online progressive and left-wing news and commentary network that began as a radio program in 2002 before its YouTube channel was launched in 2005. Full episodes and live broadcasts of The Young Turks' shows are only available to paid members on its website or via a YouTubeTV subscription.

The Young Turks' public YouTube output primarily consists of <20 minute monologues or solo videos from host Cenk Uygur speaking about a news item topical at the time of broadcast, meaning these videos were the only clips available for analysis in this report. ISD chose the 100 most recent YouTube live videos available on The Young Turks page at the time of analysis for inclusion in this research, capturing a dataset of videos published between October 2020 - January 2022.

Timcast IRL: Tim Pool's 'Timcast IRL' webcast is broadcast live up to five times per week on YouTube and all episodes are publicly available. Because of this, there were up to 400 videos available for potential analysis, each on average lasting over two hours long, making full analysis of this channel's output beyond the scope of this report. Instead, researchers created a dataset of 100 videos published between November 2020 - November 2021 and selected videos that were broadcast during periods of notable news events in the US; specifically, the period that followed the US 2020 election; the trial of Derek Chauvin in April 2021; and the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse in October 2021.

RSBN: Right Side Broadcasting Network (RSBN) is a conservative media organization and uses its website and YouTube channel to broadcast lengthy livestreams from various political events, legal hearings and religious ceremonies related to conservative, Republican and right-wing figures. Many videos are broadcasts from Donald Trump events. There are close to 200 videos available for analysis on the channel, some of which are over ten hours long, making a complete breakdown of this channel's output beyond the scope of this report. Researchers chose the ten most-viewed videos on this page for analysis, capturing videos posted between October 2020 - January 2021.

Channel Analysis and Keyword Collection

Once the dataset of 210 videos was created, ISD researchers analyzed each video and recorded every paid Super Chat comment posted throughout each broadcast, including the currency and amount spent and the text (if any) that accompanied the comment. ISD did not record the names/usernames of YouTube users who posted paid Super Chat comments. From the dataset of 210 videos, ISD researchers collected a total sample of 17,152 Super Chat comments. The next step was to develop a list of keywords to examine the total sample.

ISD generated a comprehensive list of keywords to capture discourse related to conspiracy theories and threats of harm or violence related to recent political topics in the US such as the 2020 presidential election, the insurrection in Washington DC on January 6 2021, and COVID-19, among other topics. The selection of keywords was informed by previous ISD research, in combination with insights from our ongoing monitoring and analysis of political discourse in the US.

Researchers also conducted a validation exercise to omit keywords that returned results that were not relevant to our research interests or did not return any results from the sample. For example, generic terms like “COVID,” “president” and “government” were removed. The final list consisted of 100 keywords.

ISD then analyzed the total sample of 17,152 Super Chat comments and extracted the comments that contained one or more of these specific keywords. At this stage, analysts manually removed false positives, i.e. content that appeared to neutrally discuss or criticize the related keyword, or was judged to not be supportive of conspiracy theories, misinformation or threats of violence. The final dataset consisted of a sample of 907 comments (5% of the total sample of 17,152 comments) featuring the keywords across the three YouTube channels.

Case Studies

Timcast IRL

Background

Tim Pool is a podcast host and political commentator who hosts near-daily broadcasts on the TimCast IRL YouTube channel in which he commentates on leading political stories. Pool first came to prominence during the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York and later worked with Vice and Fusion TV before concentrating primarily on YouTube where he now operates a number of channels, including Timcast IRL.

Pool has described himself as socially liberal but aligned with conservative, right-wing perspectives on issues like immigration, and he supported Donald Trump in the 2020 election.¹³ A study from the Election Integrity Partnership found that Pool helped to amplify false pro-Trump narratives promoting voter fraud claims during the 2020 presidential election.¹⁴ On YouTube, Pool regularly hosts figures from across the right-wing spectrum including Alex Jones, Jack Posobiec and Enrique Tarrio, leader of the Proud Boys.

Super Chats

ISD analyzed 100 videos on the Timcast IRL channel, broadcast between October 2020 - November 2021, and recorded every Super Chat payment and comment posted on these videos. In total, 13,839 Super Chats were published during these video broadcasts, amounting to \$219,416.22 that was sent to the Timcast IRL channel. Bearing in mind the 70/30 split between channel and platform, these comments earned Timcast IRL \$153,591.35 and they earned YouTube \$65,824.86.

Each video received, on average, \$2,194. In one video, broadcast in November 2021 during the Kyle Rittenhouse trial, Pool hosted Alex Jones and Joe Rogan, among other guests, on the show and this video received over \$10,600: the largest amount of any video in the dataset.

ISD analyzed the sample of 13,839 Super Chat comments for terms promoting misinformation, false claims, conspiracy theories and/or threats of violence and identified 720 comments that fit this criteria, accounting for 5% of the total sample. These 720 comments equate to \$11,647.87 (also 5% of the total amount of money spent on the channel).

Taking into account the 70/30 split, these comments earned Timcast IRL \$8,153.50 and they earned YouTube \$3,494.36.

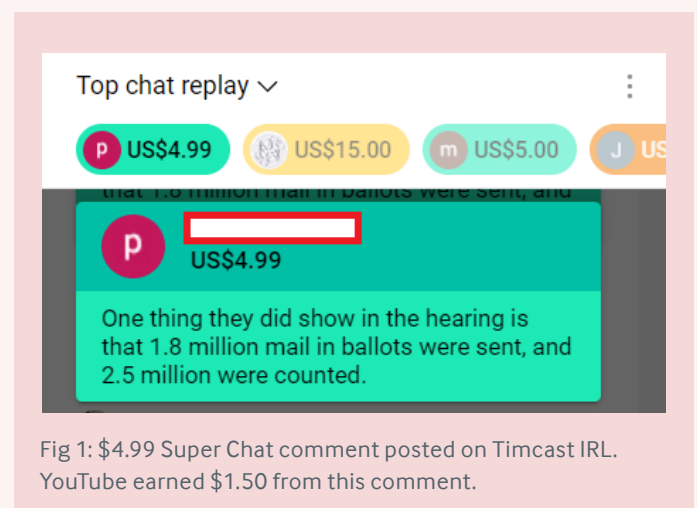
Analysis

2020 Presidential Election Misinformation

Regarding election misinformation, YouTube's guidelines prohibits content that "advances false claims that widespread fraud, errors, or glitches changed the outcome of select past national elections."¹⁵ ISD recorded 188 paid Super Chat comments posted on Timcast IRL videos referencing false or misleading claims about mail-in ballots, supposed ballot stuffing, voter fraud and conspiracy theories about Dominion Voting Systems.

13 Super Chat comments posted in these videos directly referenced claims about mail-in ballots. For example, a YouTube user posted on one Timcast IRL video and said "Democrats are gonna forge mail in ballots to win again in 2024" (**\$20 Super Chat (SC)**) while another claimed that 1.8 million mail-in ballots were sent to voters in Pennsylvania but 2.5 million votes were counted, alleging this was proof of fraud (**\$4.99 SC**). The same claim was the subject of an Associated Press fact check when it went viral in December 2020.¹⁶

23 Super Chat comments directly referenced Dominion Voting Systems. In one example, a YouTube user posted the text of an article from the conspiracy website Natural News¹⁷ claiming to show Dominion voting machines being hacked (**\$20 SC**), while another comment claimed that data uncovered on Hunter



Biden's laptop confirmed Dominion had ties to a "Chinese banking firm" (**\$17.38 SC**). The same claim was the subject of a fact check by USA Today.¹⁸

16 Super Chat comments referenced post-election audits that contained false claims like allegations that the statewide inquiries were rigged. Two such comments claimed that members of the Black Lives Matter movement arrived at locations in Arizona to "disrupt the forensic audit" or "stop the audit" (**\$10 and \$50 SCs**), while another comment claimed that "57,000 ballots" with "questionable validity" were found during an Arizona audit. (**\$10.86 SC**). The AP issued a fact check in September 2021 confirming this claim was false.¹⁹

January 6 and Threats of Violence

Tim Pool broadcast live on Timcast IRL on 6 January 2021 and spoke about the events that occurred in the Capitol in Washington DC earlier that day. He criticized the use of violence and said "non-violence civil disobedience" should always be the preferred method for protests. Super Chats were not available or viewable on this video and during the broadcast Pool said that, for unspecified reasons, YouTube had disabled the tool. However, in the videos released just before and after 6 January, the Super Chats tool was used by viewers of the Timcast IRL viewers to spread calls for violence in relation to the events of 6 January.

In the Timcast IRL video broadcast on 5 January, ISD identified four messages advocating the use of violence at the Capitol the following day, including "Prepare yourselves - the wicked and immoral will be annihilated - this is the only way," (**\$6.66 SC**); "The only effective threat is the threat to become ungovernable. An orderly protest has no power" (**\$5 SC**); "The time of war is here. Only a fool still has faith in the courts" (**\$4.99 SC**); and

"...I have no problem leaving Antifa weaklings bleeding out in the street..." (**\$20 SC**).

ISD also identified at least ten Super Chat comments posted during the Timcast IRL 7 January broadcast that included threats and supported or called for violence. These appear to be direct violations of YouTube's guidelines on content that "encourages dangerous or illegal activities" and its harassment guidelines, which prohibit content that threatens individuals.^{20 21}

A sample of other pro-violence Super Chat comments include:

- "For those saying it did nothing, the most powerful people in the world were laying on the ground and hiding behind chairs because, for a moment, their bubble that made them untouchable was popped." (**\$20 SC**)
- "Violence works... violence towards the establishment works EXTREMELY well" (**\$20 SC**)
- "Only use violence if necessary!" (**\$19.99 SC**)
- "Violence may not produce results but the threat of it or fear of [sic] can." (**\$10 SC**)
- "I was there!! Pence tweeted he wasn't going to take a stand. some yelled let's take the building. we made a point. we will not be silenced anymore." (**\$20 SC**)

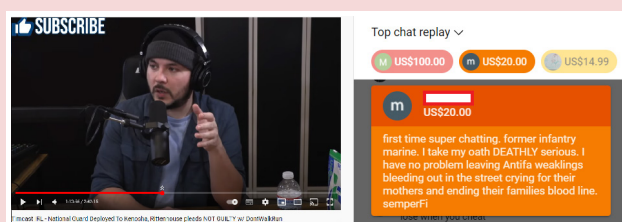


Fig 2: \$20 Super Chat comment posted on Timcast IRL. YouTube earned \$6 from this comment.

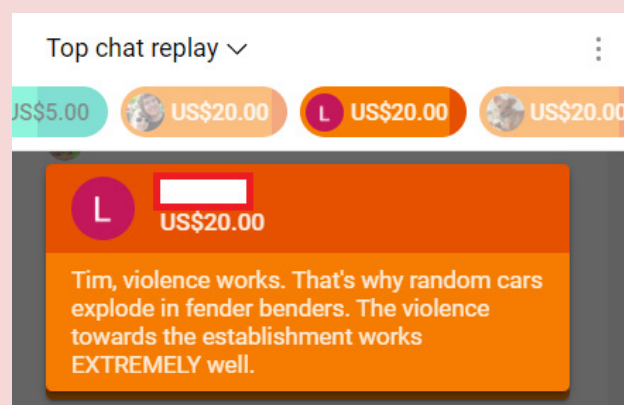


Fig 3: \$20 Super Chat comment posted on Timcast IRL. YouTube earned \$6 from this comment.

COVID-19 Conspiracy Content

YouTube's community guidelines related to COVID-19 misinformation state that YouTube does not allow content that spreads "medical misinformation that contradicts local health authorities' (LHA) or the World Health Organization's (WHO) medical information about COVID-19."²² The guidelines are detailed and feature 67 bullet points (at the time of writing) that highlight various types of prohibited content.

ISD identified 30 Super Chat comments that contained false or misleading content in reference to vaccines posted during Timcast IRL broadcasts. For example, one comment stated "The vaccine is poison Tim. You will come to see it in time" (**\$10 SC**) while another claimed 100 people died during a trial of the "[Bill] Gates vaccine... within 7 days" of receiving the vaccine. (**\$4.99 SC**). This claim was the subject of a Reuters fact check.²³

At least three comments included false claims about substances found in the vaccine ingredient like graphene and fetal parts. Three others propagated claims that the vaccines are a cover up as part of a sinister plot by world elites to enact population controls across the globe, including one comment that described vaccines against a "lab made virus" akin to "genocide." (**\$5 SC**) Seven Super Chat comments contained content that claimed that COVID-19 was not real or was a planned event, and eight comments contained content that promoted treatments like Ivermectin or Hydroxychloroquine to

treat COVID-19. The promotion of unproven COVID-19 treatments is prohibited under YouTube's COVID-19 misinformation guidelines.²⁴

Though YouTube's COVID-related guidelines don't contain policies that directly reference the promotion of violence in the context of the pandemic, ISD found numerous examples that fit this definition. One comment described Bill Gates as an enemy of the people (**\$10 SC**). Dr. Anthony Fauci was also the subject of similar comments, including one that suggested Fauci deserved an "alien face hugger" (**\$20 SC**), describing a creature from the movie *Alien* that killed humans by attaching themselves to a person's face and laying eggs inside their body.

Chauvin, Rittenhouse Trials, BLM Commentary and Potential Hate Speech Violations

While examining Super Chats comments posted on Timcast IRL broadcasts that covered the trials of Derek Chauvin and Kyle Rittenhouse, ISD identified various comments referencing both men, as well as George Floyd, Jacob Blake and the wider Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, that appear to violate YouTube's policies against hate speech. The guidelines prohibit content that promotes hatred or dehumanizes individuals, cites stereotypes and slurs, claims individuals are inferior or alleges the superiority of any group over others, all based on a list of protected attributes like race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation sex/gender, among other attributes.²⁵

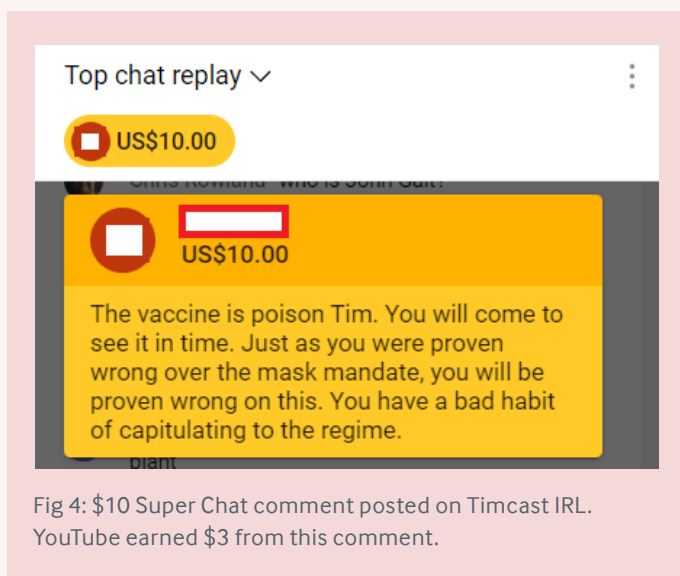


Fig 4: \$10 Super Chat comment posted on Timcast IRL. YouTube earned \$3 from this comment.

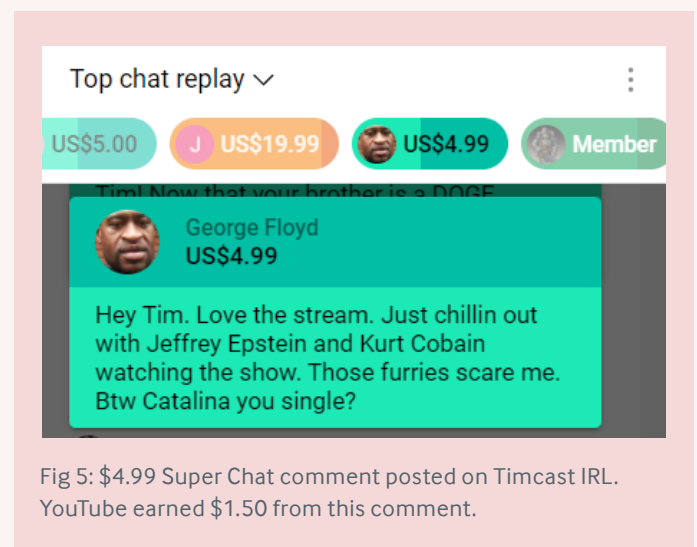


Fig 5: \$4.99 Super Chat comment posted on Timcast IRL. YouTube earned \$1.50 from this comment.

In one example posted on a video related to Chauvin's trial, a YouTube user claimed that there was a racial motive underpinning the prosecution against the police officer and said "if Floyd had been White or Chauvin black this barely would've been mentioned on local news" (\$20 SC), while another user posted a similar comment during a video related to Rittenhouse's trial. This comment read "If Kyle was black, MSNBC would be calling his attackers white supremacists. That is a fact." (\$4.99 SC). Some comments contained directed slurs also, such as one comment that referred to Floyd as a "black man (the drug dealer)" (\$20 SC).

Separate from hate speech, ISD also noted the activity of one YouTube account calling itself George Floyd and using a photo of him. The user posted a Super Chat comment saying they, as Floyd, were "chillin' out with Jeffrey Epstein and Kurt Cobain" (\$4.99 SC). This comment is a direct violation of YouTube's impersonation policies but it remains live on the platform.²⁶

12 Super Chat comments contained content that criticized the BLM movement based on racist and hateful prejudices. For example, one comment stated that "BLM wants police to let minorities kill each other" (\$20 SC) while another falsely claimed BLM called for the killing of George Zimmerman (\$5 SC) incorrectly citing and misquoting a Gateway Pundit article in support of the claim. Other comments described BLM as "race hustlers" (\$50 SC) and "black supremacists." (\$5 SC)

These comments were closely tied to wider racist comments aimed at Black people, illustrated in the following comments. "My fear is, the BLM narrative that rewards the families of black victims killed in police shootings (justified or not) with settlements and GoFundMe's will create the same type of system Terrorist networks use to recruit poor suicide bombers" (\$50 SC) and "BLM and GoFundMe accounts [are] the new AlQuaeda. If I'm poor, black, POC, and I know suicide by cop can net me millions as the current trends suggest." (\$200 SC)

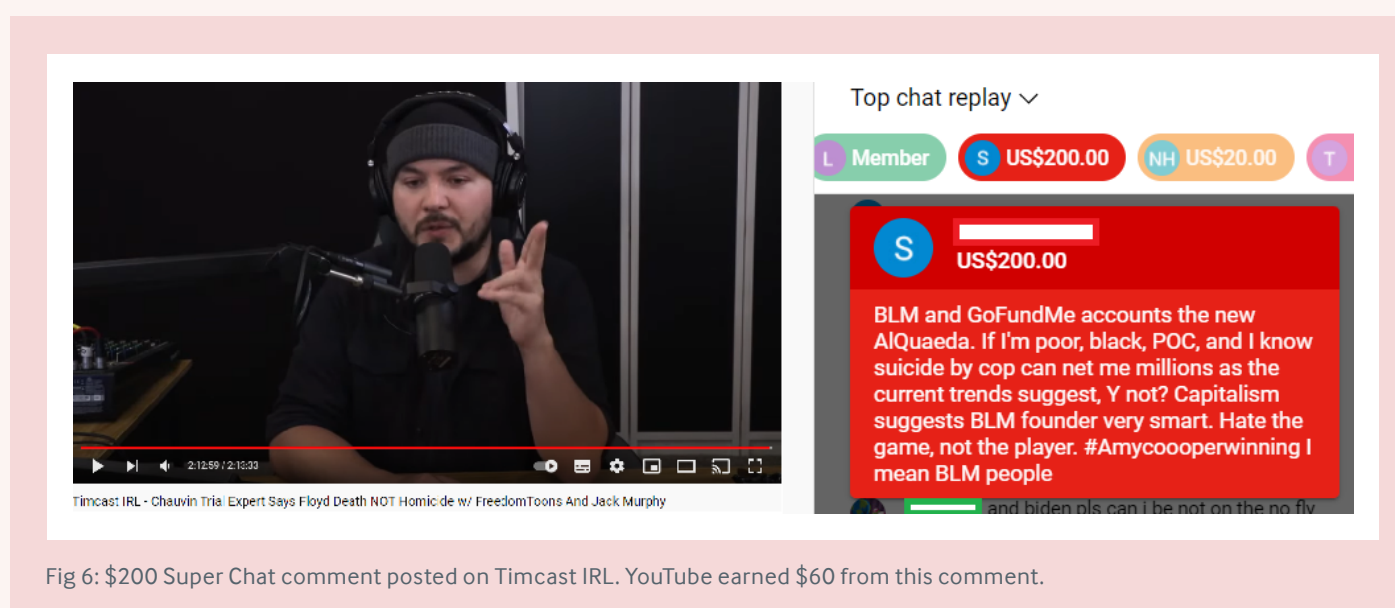


Fig 6: \$200 Super Chat comment posted on Timcast IRL. YouTube earned \$60 from this comment.

Right Side Broadcasting Network

Background

Right Side Broadcasting Network (RSBN) is a conservative media organization that started as a YouTube channel in 2015 and was solely devoted to livestreaming Donald Trump rallies, who was then a presidential candidate. The channel rapidly gained followers and subscribers online and grew into a fully-fledged media company.²⁷ RSBN has expanded to include events for various right-wing initiatives, including numerous broadcasts devoted to press conferences and events used to promote false voter fraud claims pre- and post-2020 election.

RSBN has over 1.5 million subscribers on YouTube and over 200 past livestreams, most typically showing Trump events, arguably making this one of the most influential politics channels on the platform. The channel has faced disciplinary action from YouTube in the past on at least two occasions. In March 2021, RSBN posted on Twitter and said it had been “suspended from YouTube for two weeks” after broadcasting a speech by Donald Trump at the 2021 CPAC conference which violated the platform’s guidelines on election misinformation.²⁸

Super Chats

ISD analyzed 10 videos on the RSBN channel, broadcast on the channel between October 2020 - January 2021. As noted in the methodology, some of the videos of the RSBN YouTube channel are up to 10 hours long so analyzing a large portion of this channel was beyond the scope of this report. Instead, we chose the ten most-viewed videos for analysis.

In total, 1,434 Super Chat comments were published during these video broadcasts, amounting to \$23,975.69 that was sent to the RSBN channel during these 10 videos. Bearing in mind the 70/30 split between channel and platform, these comments earned RSBN \$16,782.98 and they earned YouTube \$7,192.71.

ISD analyzed the sample of 1,434 Super Chat comments to identify comments that featured terms promoting misinformation, false claims, conspiracy theories and/or threats of violence and identified 145 comments that fit this criteria, accounting for 10% of the total sample.

These 145 comments equate to \$1,652.75 (23% of the total amount of money spent on the channel). Taking into account the 70/30 split, these comments earned RSBN \$1,156.93 and they earned YouTube \$495.82.

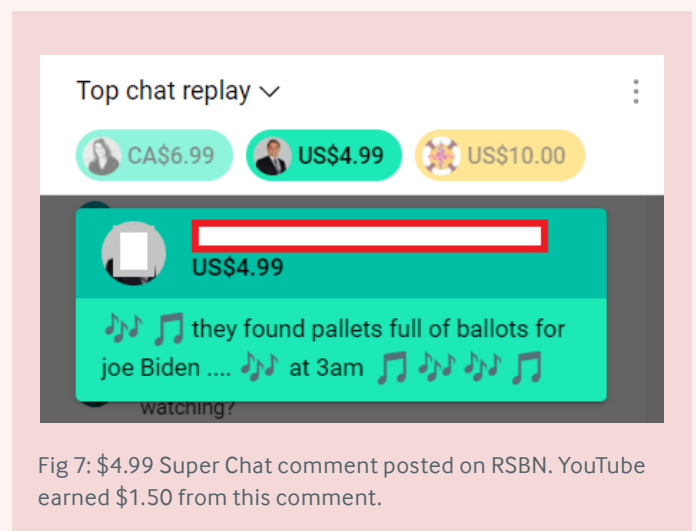
Analysis

As the ten most viewed videos on the RSBN channel came from a period between October 2020 - January 2021, they featured content that was exclusively related to the presidential election, including public events, rallies and speeches related to the promotion of Donald Trump’s voter fraud conspiracies.

2020 Presidential Election Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories

16 Super Chat comments directly claimed “fraud” was rampant in the election and 7 Super Chat comments directly referenced claims about mail-in ballots. For example, during a RSBN video broadcast from a Georgia Senate meeting regarding election integrity, one comment promoted footage they claimed showed “multiple ballot scanning and evidence shredding” (**\$20 SC**). A comment posted during a broadcast from a similar event in Michigan claimed that “pallets full of ballots for Joe Biden” were found “at 3am” in one location (**\$4.99 SC**). The same claim was the subject of a fact check by Politifact who stated that the claim was a “misinterpretation of how counting mail-in ballots works.”²⁹

Two comments directly referenced conspiracies related to Dominion Voting systems (**\$5 and \$20 SC**) while two comments linked to a website run by the America Project, an initiative led by “pro-Trump millionaire



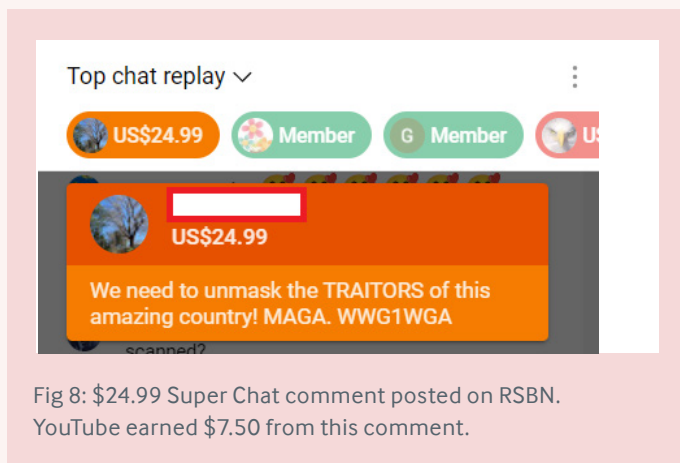


Fig 8: \$24.99 Super Chat comment posted on RSN. YouTube earned \$7.50 from this comment.

Patrick Byrne” that encouraged online users to submit content and materials in support of conspiracies implicating Dominion in voter fraud violations. (**\$5 and \$50 SCs**)³⁰ The Stop the Steal movement was promoted in 15 comments related to voter fraud claims. This was observed in such comments that read “We won this - Stop the Steal” (**\$20 SC**); “these election officials are corrupt and everyone knows it. Stop the Steal” (**\$5 SC**); and “Stop the Steal. Expose all frauds.” (**\$5 SC**)

Amongst this sample, ISD also found widespread promotion for QAnon theories. 13 comments directly referenced the conspiracy movement through the use of the phrase “WWG1WGA” in support of Trump’s claims about voter fraud and his allegations that the election was stolen. Some of these comments even contained

threats and hostile language, such as one comment that read “We need to unmask the traitors of this amazing country! MAGA. WWG1WGA.” (**\$24.99 SC**)

January 6 and Threats of Violence

One video captured in this sample was the January 6 RSN livestream from DC. Along with various comments promoting voter fraud claims like those highlighted above, this broadcast also facilitated dozens of comments openly advocating violence and harmful threats too. As events on the ground at the Capitol turned violent, general pro-violence comments included:

- “Civil War is NOTHING NEW. Do NOT be afraid” (**\$5 SC**)
- “We MUST take back our country. Now is the time. WAR” (**\$5 SC**)
- “This is about the preservation of our freedoms. never back down! Never Surrender!” (**\$10 SC**)
- “1776!!!!!! DO NOT BACK DOWN” (**\$4.99 SC**)³¹

The video chat also hosted violent comments directly referencing politicians like then-Vice President Mike Pence and Democratic nominee Joe Biden, including “PENCE CHANGED TWITTER BACKGROUND TO BIDEN/ HARRIS.. HE IS A TRAITOR” (**\$5 SC**) and “Biden never said anything when his supporters were burning down buildings..we are taking our government back” (**\$5 SC**). At the time of writing, all of these comments are still live on YouTube.

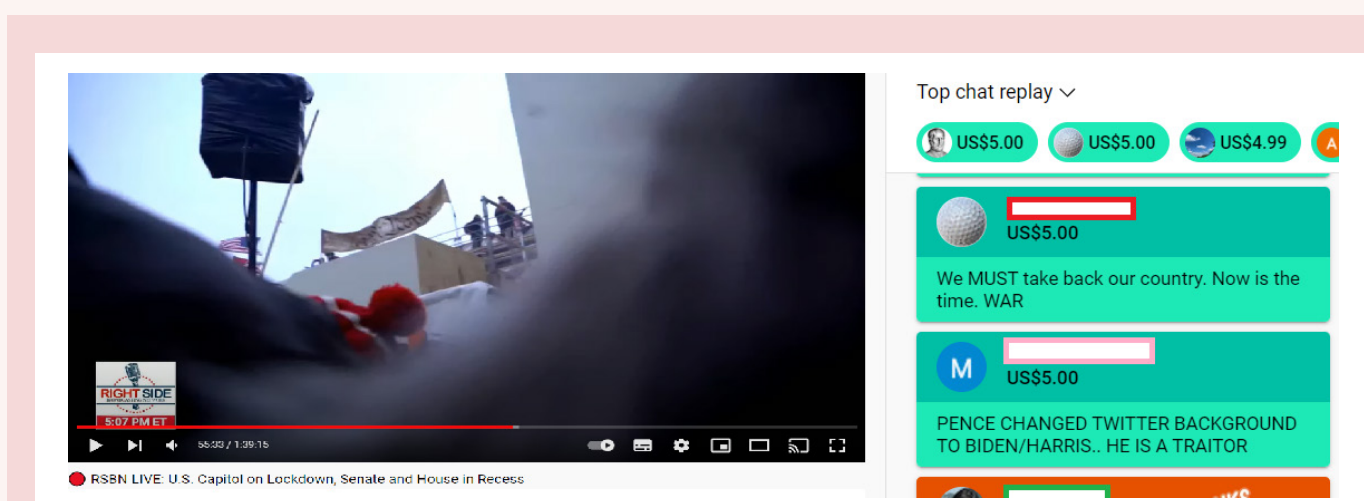


Fig 9: Two separate violative \$5 Super Chat comments posted on RSN’s January 6 livestream outside the US Capitol in Washington DC. YouTube earned \$1.50 from both of these comments.

The Young Turks

Background

The Young Turks is a progressive and left-wing online news and commentary network that began as a radio program in 2002 before its YouTube channel was launched in 2005. Its flagship show, also named The Young Turks, receives 100 million views monthly, according to the network's website, and the network now has over 20 shows available via its website and YouTube channel and is available on streaming platforms like Amazon Prime Direct and Hulu. In 2017, it was reported that the Young Turks raised \$20 million in venture capital funding.³² The Young Turks now has over five million subscribers on YouTube, making it one of the most popular political coverage channels on the platform.

Left-leaning and progressive policies such as Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, and curbing private campaign financing are promoted and advocated on programs throughout the network. During Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential run, Young Turks founder Cenk Uygur spoke at a number of his rallies and introduced him on stage and Uygur himself has also become active in political campaigning in recent years and helped to found the progressive Justice Democrats political action committee.^{33 34} In 2020, Uygur unsuccessfully ran for Congress in California's 25th district.³⁵

Super Chats

ISD analyzed 100 videos on the Young Turks channel, broadcast between October 2020 - January 2022. ISD chose the 100 most recent YouTube live videos available on the Young Turks channel at the time of analysis. In total, 1,879 Super Chat comments were published during these video broadcasts, amounting to \$14,279.57 that was sent to the Young Turks channel during these 100 videos. Bearing in mind the 70/30 split between channel and platform, these comments earned the Young Turks \$9,995.70 and they earned YouTube \$4,283.87.

ISD analyzed the sample of 1,879 Super Chat comments to identify comments that featured terms promoting misinformation, false claims, conspiracy theories and/or threats of violence and identified 42 comments that fit this criteria, accounting for 2% of the total sample.

These 42 comments equate to \$289.03 (also 2% of the total amount of money spent on the channel.) Taking into account the 70/30 split, these comments earned the Young Turks \$202.32 and they earned YouTube \$86.71.

Analysis

2020 Presidential Election Misinformation

Overall the level of Super Chat comments directly promoting claims about voter fraud on the Young Turks videos was low. In one comment, a YouTube user falsely claimed that voter fraud by a supposed Trump supporter was caught on tape in Georgia (**\$14.99 SC**) while another comment claimed that "votes at machines for Trump were changed from Biden thx [sic] to Trump's hacker friends." (**\$5 SC**). The final comment identified by ISD urged Biden to demand a recount in Florida since, they claimed, the "USPS did not deliver 27% of the mail in ballots." (**\$5 SC**) This specific claim was even the subject of a fact check by Politifact who reported that it was "100% wrong."³⁶

January 6 and Threats of Violence

The events of 6 January served as motivation for a raft of comments too, some of which included hostile and threatening language about protesters and the Republican Party. Two comments referred to the Republican Party as "traitors" (**\$1.99 and \$5 SCs**) while a third comment read "let's show these traitors what a real revolution looks like over the next 4 years." (**\$5 SC**) Many Super Chat comments contained unsubstantiated claims about Trump and his surrogates too, including a cluster of these comments that featured demeaning

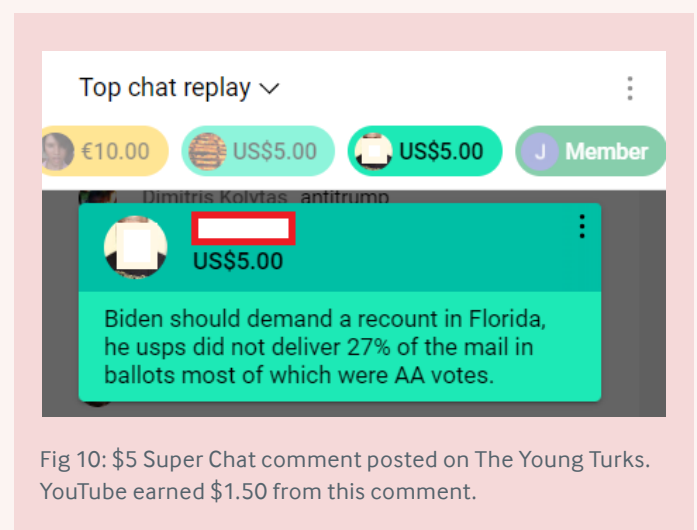
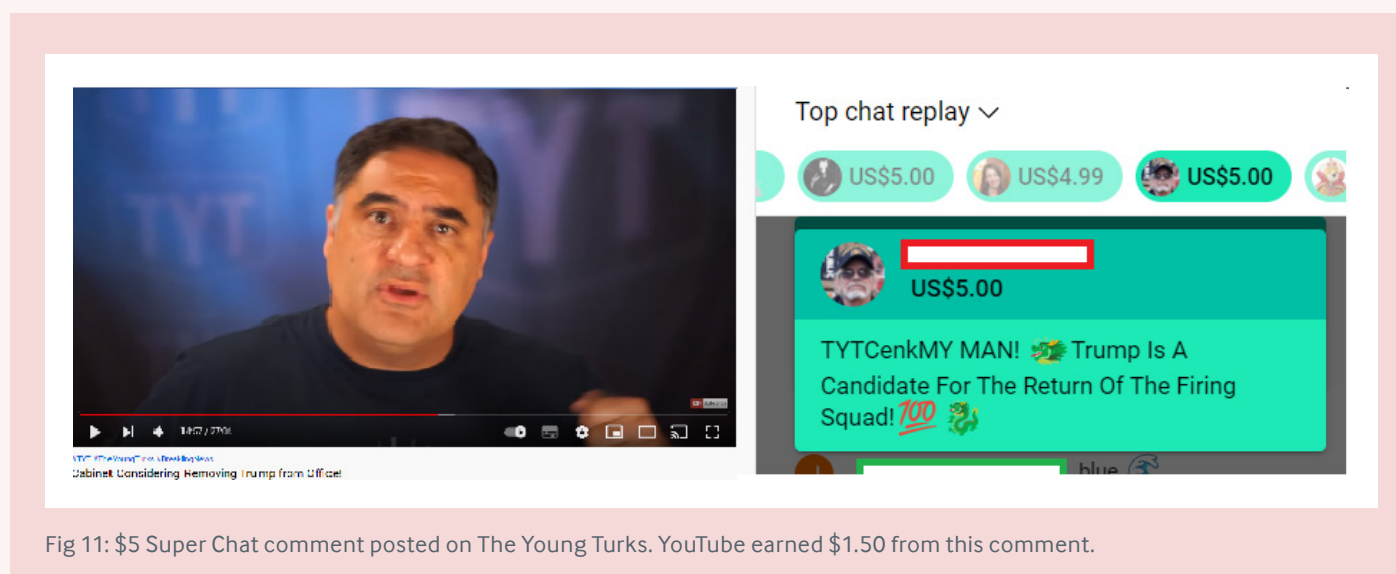
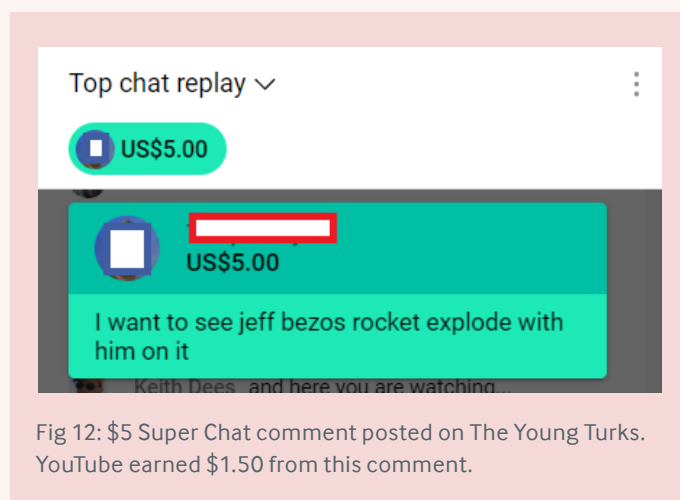


Fig 10: \$5 Super Chat comment posted on The Young Turks. YouTube earned \$1.50 from this comment.

and threatening language about the former president. One such comment referred to Trump as the “#TrumpVirus” (\$5 SC) while another comment similarly referred to Trump as a “traitor” (\$4.99 SC). Two other comments called for the death of Trump, in the aftermath of 6 January, through the “return of the firing squad” also (\$5 and \$5 SCs).

Lastly, Super Chat comments on the Young Turks channel also featured more general calls for violence, including promoting the use of firearms to achieve political aims. One such comment stated “#ArmTheLeft” (\$20 SC) while another called for the “arming and training” of “leftist militias” (\$20 SC). Finally, one other YouTube user stated that they “want to see Jeff Bezos’ rocket explode with him on it” (\$5 SC). All of these comments are still live on YouTube at the time of writing.



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