Foul Play in the Gaming Space

An introduction to
the gaming world and
the exploitation by
right-wing extremists

Contents

Results in Brief

> **Video games are a social hobby that attracts billions of people globally.**

Playing video games has become a popular interest worldwide. Over 3.2 billion people around the world play, and women make up 48 percent of players in both the United States and Europe. The average play time is 13 hours per week. Many players report that gaming has positive effects such as increased happiness in everyday life, stress relief, and inspiration. The video game industry is also a significant economic force globally as well as in Sweden.

> **A culture of hate against women, racialised groups, and LGBTQ+ individuals thrives in chat rooms and on gaming-related platforms.**

Toxic behaviour, harassment, and hate are widespread problems within gaming culture. This includes the normalisation of racist, sexist, and homophobic "jokes", negatively impacting the players' experience and well-being. This takes place in an environment where children and adolescents spend a significant part of their free time.

> **Right-wing extremists and organisations exploit the gaming environment to spread their message among children adolescents, with few filters or impediments.**

Right-wing groups have a history of infiltrating and hijacking new youth cultures for their own ideological purposes, and the gaming space is no exception. Today, they use imagery and memes from the gaming culture to spread propaganda and normalise hateful opinions as well as taking advantage of the infrastructure that the environment offers. The gaming space offers right-wing extremists opportunities for anonymity and access to a large and often young group, which they would otherwise never be able to reach on that scale.

> **When the gaming environment is used for recruitment to right-wing extremism, it constitutes a threat to the safety of both individuals and society as a whole.**

Recent studies show that right-wing extremism has a real presence within the gaming space with the potential to reach a significant number of players. Right-wing extremists can hijack platforms for socialisation and operational activities. Children and adolescents often lack both the knowledge and ability to understand the extremist forces they are being exposed to, and can therefore have a lower threshold for radicalisation. Alternatively, those who experience severe harassment and racism may have their well-being and self-image negatively impacted. Therefore, a collaborative effort is required to prevent anti-democratic forces from taking root in children and adolescents's social spaces.

The Seeds Grow Slowly Beneath the Surface

We are currently experiencing an era where populism, nationalism, and right-wing extremism is gaining ground. Academic discourse often centres on the regression of democratic principles in nations around the world where there are efforts to constrict citizens' liberties and rights. In the political arena, there is a noticeable amplification of racist and hateful rhetoric, eliciting reactions from various segments of society. This underscores the inherent fragility of democracy, necessitating its continuous preservation and vigilant defence.

The digital space has become an essential part of democratic discourse, but those who participate in public debate online must be prepared to endure both hate speech and threats. This hateful rhetoric is often directed against sexual, religious, and ethnic minorities.

A directive from 2018 by the Committee for National Efforts on Media and Information Literacy and Democratic Discourse noted that attempts to silence certain social groups from participating in public debate must be viewed as an anti-democratic phenomenon that should be countered in all forms. [1]

Right-wing extremist groups in Sweden and around the world have effectively used the internet to spread extremist propaganda, drive opinion, and recruit members. It has also been used to establish connections with like-minded individuals globally, inspiring and supporting each other's extremist movements.

In the 2010s, these activities shifted to social media platforms, and within a few years, far right organisations and actors built a strong, global presence on all social media. Something which has undoubtedly helped their ideology achieve greater impact since then.

Concurrently, this trend has been a contributing factor to the escalating radicalisation of children and adolescents in the digital realm. Often lacking both knowledge and the ability to understand the extremist forces they are exposed to, children and adolescents may have a lower threshold for radicalization.

The spread of anti-democratic and extremist messages is not limited to social media platforms like Twitter/X, Facebook, and Instagram. The same phenomenon has also been observed within the gaming world's various parts, such as in games and on gaming adjacent platforms.

The presence of right-wing extremism within the gaming world is not just a problem for those who frequent it. The hateful opinions and anti-democratic ideologies expressed here pose the risk of having consequences far beyond game servers. Individuals in the online gaming environment risk exposure to right-wing extremist, racist, queerphobic, and anti-feminist messages from a very young age, which could lead to these extremist views becoming commonplace, trivialised, and thereby normalised to this audience.

Gaming is a social and developmentally stimulating hobby as well as an important meeting place for many, especially children and adolescents. Therefore, it is crucial that this space is safe, accessible, and welcoming to all.

The Expo Foundation was established in 1995, to examine and call attention to the threat posed by the then-emerging neo-nazism. At the time, the movement was born from the skinhead culture and white power music, capturing how the right-wing extremism of that time co-opted a youth and counter movement.

Today, another youth culture has grown strong, and right-wing extremists have been given free rein for their propaganda and organisational development. In the future, the gaming environment might be similarly described as the starting point for a new wave of even more severe right-wing extremism. Unless we stop it in time.

References
1. Committee Directive 2018:88

The Gaming Space Affects Us All

This is the first of a three part report series from the Expo Foundation's project *Foul Play — Right-wing extremism in the gaming world*. Through the project, Expo aims to contribute to increased knowledge about how young people are exposed to right-wing extremist messaging within the gaming space, as well as to enhance the understanding of how this exposure can lead to the normalisation of violent racist ideas and radicalisation.

In these reports, we will map out and examine how racist and right-wing extremist messages are expressed and function in gaming environments that attract young people. We will explore the factors behind this, point out gaps in current preventive efforts, as well as highlight proposals for solutions.

The reports focus on the particular vulnerability of young people in the environment. This will be achieved through an examination of the extreme forces children and adolescents are exposed to and the risks this entails, rather than an investigation of the vulnerability of children and adolescents directly. Children and adolescents make up a large (if not the largest) portion of gamers, while also being a target group that right-wing extremists actively pursue with propaganda.

It is also an environment that many adults in children's lives lack knowledge about, which complicates their ability to support and protect them. An issue that this report hopes to help mitigate.

The purpose of this first report is to provide an introduction to the key actors, platforms, and terminology within the gaming world, why the gaming world is an attractive place for far right influence, and the threats and risks posed by the presence of the far right.

We aim to address the lack of knowledge we have identified among many adults who play an important role in countering and preventing the radicalisation of young people. For those who do not play video games themselves, it can be an insurmountably steep learning curve for parents, teachers, and other officials to effectively support children. The report intends to help bridge this gap and strengthen parents and officials in their roles.

There are very few places outside of school that gather as large a part of society's youth as the gaming world. We focus particularly on young people because they are a group that, due to their age, is poorly equipped to understand and respond to the ideological propaganda they risk being exposed to. It is likely that they lack both the knowledge to understand the nuances of societal issues that have been debated for decades and insight into the seriousness of the violent consequences the ideology would have if it were to gain increased influence.

Young people are all potential victims, audience, as well as participants in the spread of hate and threats. Additionally, they are a group that right-wing extremist organisations are eager to attract, and the gaming world could become an optimal environment for recruitment.

In report number two we will delve further into and expand on how right-wing extremists use the gaming space and what risks this entails for young people as well as society at large. The third and concluding report focuses on what the gaming industry and other relevant actors have done to address the issue so far, which actors can and should be part of the solution as well as a list of suggested measures for both the gaming industry and officials and politicians.

Limitations

The report uses the term "gaming world" or "gaming space" rather than "game world" because this series of reports does not include board games, only video- and computer games, hereinafter referred to as "video games" or "games". The focus is on certain types of games and different gaming adjacent platforms.

We have opted to exclude certain gaming adjacent platforms, including Reddit, as a comprehensive review of the platform falls outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that this is a platform that is of great relevance to the spread of propaganda and hateful rhetoric in the gaming space and a more in-depth review is warranted beyond what has been done thus far.

The emphasis of the study has been placed on games and environments where we see a prevalent right-wing presence and which offer opportunities for right-wing extremists to reach out to a considerably large group of young people. As a result, the reports focus on online multiplayer games on PCs/consoles, excluding mobile games from this study. This exclusion applies, with the exception of games that exist on both mobile phones and PCs/consoles, such as Roblox.

Common terms

Player and Gamer

In this report, we differentiate between the terms *player* and *gamer*. By player, we refer to everyone who plays video games, whether it's on a PC, Mac, or on a game console. By gamer, we instead refer to players who use that term to describe (part of) their identity or self-image.

Gaming Culture

Another term that is used recurrently is *gaming culture*. Within the scope of the report, this refers to the common culture that establishes norms for behaviour, language, and the like, for those who identify themselves as gamers. A large proportion of those who play video games do *not* belong to this group.

Right-Wing Extremism

In this series of reports, the terms *right-wing extremism/right-wing extremists*, e*xtreme right* and the *far right* are used synonymously. Right-wing extremism is an umbrella term that covers everything from nazism and white power ideology to ethnonationalism. It houses everything from the populist, anti-feminist, and xenophobic alt-right movement that is primarily found online, to more formal organisations that wish to change society based on biological racist beliefs.

Although the ideological details may vary, there are common themes that characterise the extreme right. It is a misogynistic ideology that advocates strict traditional gender roles, women's inferiority to men, and heterosexuality as the norm. Anything outside of heterosexual relationships with traditional gender roles is considered harmful and unnatural. The ideology is therefore inherently homophobic and transphobic.

In most cases, there is an element of violent extremism and a characterisation of violence as a male virtue. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are other characteristics, and in its extreme, it propagates for white ethno-states where only native, white individuals have the right to live and advocates for race wars to achieve this goal.

The extreme right is also characterised by its authoritarianism and a preference for hierarchical systems. Society should be characterised by strict order and with transgressions punished very harshly. Finally, right-wing extremism is characterised by its populism. They claim to represent a repressed and silenced majority against a corrupt establishment, which includes the media and the political establishment.
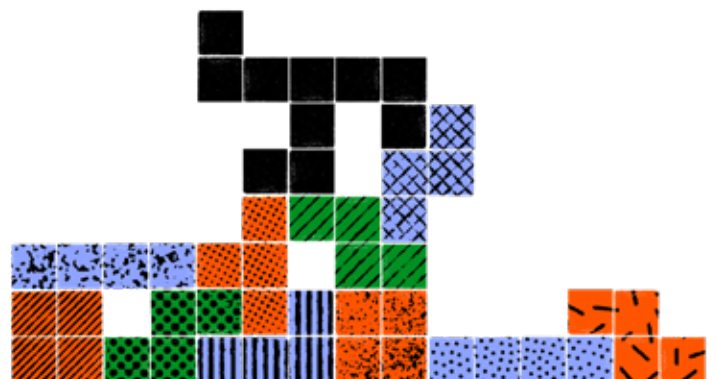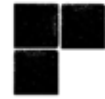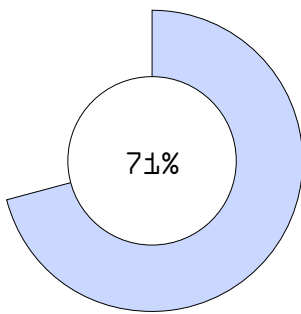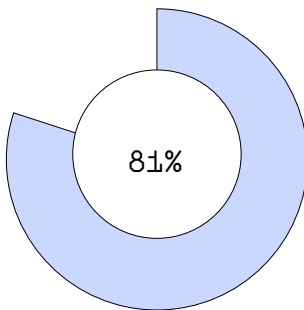
Chapter 1

A Billion-Dollar
Industry Attracting
a Whole World

I n this chapter the economic extent, as well as internal structure, and adjacency to other subcultures of the gaming world will be introduc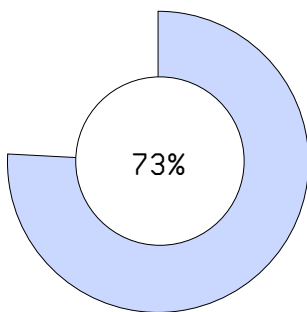ed. It is important to have an overview and understanding of the environment where video games, young people and right-wing extremists meet, in order to understand how it can be exploited and hijacked by individuals who want to spread right-wing extremism.

Gaming as a hobby has become incredibly popular. 3.2 billion people worldwide play video games.[2] Over half of the European population aged between 6 and 64 play video games, with an even greater proportion observed in the younger age brackets.

Video games are a varied medium that attracts a diverse audience. Some of the positive effects that players highlight are increased enjoyment in everyday life, reduced stress, and inspiration.[3] Previously being a hobby dominated by a male audience, women now make up 48 percent of gamers, both in the United States and Europe.[4]

Video games are not just a popular hobby but also a considerable global economic industry. The World Economic Forum reported in 2021 that the global video games industry generated 214.2 billion dollars with the forecast that this figure will have risen to 321 billion dollars by 2026.[5]

In 2021, there were 785 active companies within the Swedish video game industry which together generated almost 59 billion Swedish kronor. Moreover, these Swedish companies had a total of approximately 19,000 employees both in and outside of Sweden in 2022.[6] Swedish video game development has also been successful internationally. Games developed in Sweden have been downloaded about six billion times and nearly a fourth of the global population has played a video game developed by a Swedish company at some point.

In other words, it is an industry that has in just a few decades grown from a hobby for enthusiasts to a worldwide industry with cultural and economic significance.

Percentage of Video Game Players by Age Group

71%

6-10 years

81%

11-14 years

73%

15-24 years

Source: Video Games Europe (2023)

Average Time Spent Playing Games Each Week

22%

1-3h a week

25%

3h+ a week

53%
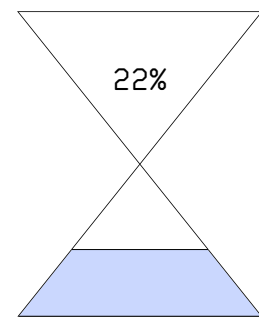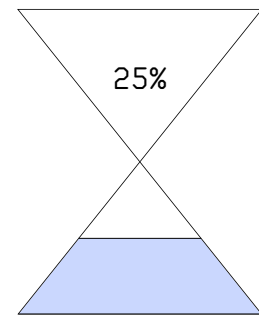
7h+ a week

Source: The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) (2022)

Popular video games with right-wing extremist presence

There is a seemingly endless amount of video games. In 2022, 10,963 new video games were released on the sales platform Steam.[7] It is difficult to describe all these games in general terms. Steam divides its games into six different genres; *Action*, *Role-Playing*, *Strategy*, *Adventure*, *Simulation*, and *Sports & Racing*. For a closer explanation of these and many more terms, see the glossary on Expo's website.

Hateful messages can be spread in most games with chat functions, but a number of games have been identified as those with the highest presence of right-wing extremism.[8] Therefore these games become particularly interesting to examine more closely. Below follows a short description of the games in question, and in chapter three we will provide an in-depth exploration into the connection to right-wing extremism.

▫ Call of Duty (CoD)

A series of First-Person Shooters (FPS) that focus on military conflicts and offer intense action-filled combat and realistic graphics. The game can be played in both single-player mode or in multiplayer mode against other players online.
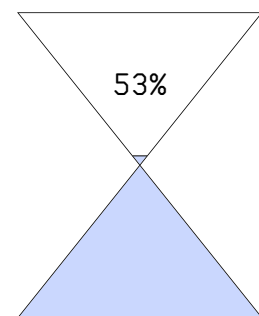
▫ Counter-strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO)

One of the most successful and popular FPS games, developed by Valve Corporation. Players are divided into two teams, terrorists and counter-terrorists. Players can buy weapons and equipment at each round and must use strategy and cooperation to achieve objectives and eliminate opponents.

▫ Dota 2

A free online game in the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) category developed by Valve Corporation. Players are divided into two teams of five and compete to destroy the opponent's base. Through strategy and cooperation, players must conquer territory, defeat enemies, and achieve goals in order to win. Dota 2 is known for its complexity, large audience and active esports scene and is one of the most successful MOBA games.

▫ Fortnite

A very popular, free online game developed by Epic Games. It is a "Battle Royale" game, and players can collect resources, build structures, and use various weapons and items to eliminate opponents. Fortnite has mainly attracted a younger audience.

▫ Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V)

An action-adventure game developed by the game studio Rockstar. It offers an extensive narrative and an open dynamic game world where players can explore the city, carry out missions, and interact with various Non-Player Characters (NPCs, read more in the glossary) and activities. The game also has an online multiplayer component where players can play together (GTA V Online).

▫ League of Legends (LoL)

A free online game developed by Riot Games and one of the most successful e-sports games in the world. It is a MOBA game where two teams of five players each compete to destroy the opponent's base. Players choose characters (champions) with different skills and roles in the match.

▫ Players Unknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG: Battlegrounds)

An online multiplayer game developed by PUBG Corporation. It was one of the first "Battle Royale" games, and players must search for weapons, equipment, and vehicles in order to survive and eliminate opponents. PUBG has been one of the most influential games within the Battle Royale genre and attracts a somewhat older audience than Fortnite.

▫ Roblox

Launched in 2006, Roblox claims to have 66 million active users globally every day.[9] Roblox is a "Sandbox" game with a very young audience, but is also played by adults. The game offers opportunities for users to create their own game modules, or "experiences" on Roblox servers, which act as separate rooms. Roblox is thus a game that is created to be modified by the users themselves.

▫ Valorant

A tactical FPS game developed by Riot Games. The game offers a team-based multiplayer component where two teams of five compete against each other. Each player chooses a character (agent) with unique abilities and the goal is to plan strategically and cooperate to eliminate the opposing team and achieve goals on the game map.

▫ World of Warcraft (WoW)

A Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) developed by Blizzard Entertainment. It is set in a mediaeval fantasy world where players can create their own characters from different races and classes. WoW is one of the most successful MMORPG games of all time.

Popular platforms

A common misconception is that video games are a solitary hobby for the introverted. However, given the substantial number of participants, it becomes evident that this is not true. Gaming is a social hobby that players share with their friends as well as with a global community. The hobby provides endless opportunities to meet and socialise with new people and friends, facilitated not only within the games themselves but also through various gaming adjacent platforms.

The social dynamics of gaming can vary. Some play together with their schoolmates and talk to each other in private voice chat rooms, others play with friends they have met online through a video game. Additionally, numerous social platforms provide a space for players all over the world to chat about their shared interest in video games.

In a study from 2022 surveying gamers, 83 percent of respondents said that video games had led to new friendships or relationships.[10] 61 percent answered that they had met people they otherwise never would have met and 78 percent believed that video games had helped them participate in more social interactions than they otherwise would.[11]

The global community is an essential part of the gaming world, and sharing one's hobby with others is often what keeps the interest alive.

Discord

Discord is a social platform designed for gamers that allows its users to create virtual servers (or so-called "rooms") for a more or less unlimited number of members. In the rooms, they can write, voice chat, and live stream games with each other.

The servers can vary from a few classmates using it as a group chat where they can send memes and talk while they play together, to servers for fans of a specific game or influencers (popular online creators) with thousands of members.

Discord, initially designed for gaming, has expanded its usage beyond its original purpose, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as an increasing number of people sought new digital meeting spaces. The platform has, among other things, attracted controversial influencers such as Andrew Tate (for more information about Andrew Tate see Expo's website).

Steam

Steam is the largest online store for video games offering over 50,000 different games. The platform was established by the game studio Valve in 2003 and is today one of the gaming world's most popular and central institutions.

Steam transcends its role as a store by also offering its own social features such as friends, profiles,

"The global community is an essential part of the gaming world"

Video Game Player Play With

56% Friends

35% Spouse/partner

32% Other family members

43% "Online only" friends (up from 22% in 2021)

25% Child(ren)

7% Parents
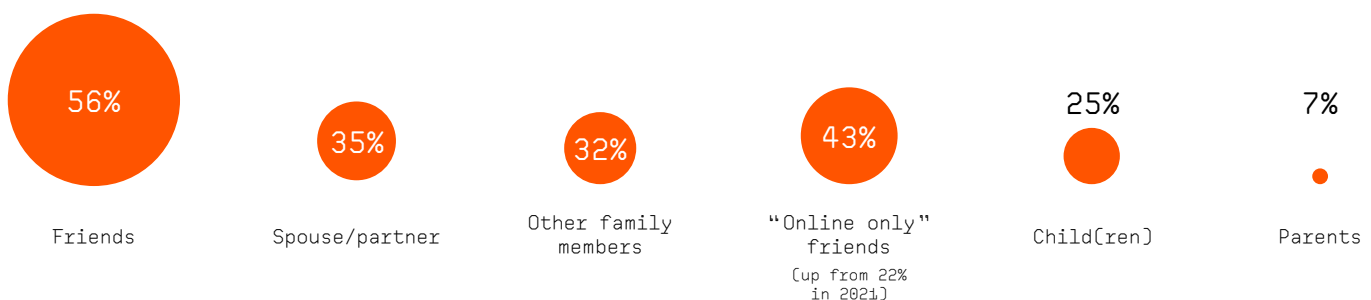
Steam founder Gabe Newell has achieved sainthood status in the gaming world.

groups, chat and call functions, and live streaming. In 2020, Steam reported that they had an average of 120 million active users per month. Steam popularity surged during the pandemic but continues to break records even today. In May 2023, they reached over 31 million simultaneous users on the platform.[12]

Steam's long presence and enormous popularity in the gaming space have led gamers to jokingly regard Steam as something that borders on the sacred. The founder Gabe Newell (or Lord Gaben as he is often called) is often portrayed as God, Jesus or Mary in memes.

Twitch

Twitch is the most popular live streaming platform. The platform was originally designed (2011) for users to be able to watch others play video games. Twitch inspired by the then-existing phenomenon of videos with people playing games on YouTube, took it further to real-time entertainment.

Live broadcasts of gaming have drawn millions of viewers to the platform, where the audience can both watch, and chat with the streamer as well as each other. The chat function, which allows the streamer to talk to their audience and the viewers to discuss the game with each other, is in many ways at the heart of Twitch and the community that exists on the platform. Unlike leaving comments on a YouTube video of a person playing, this is a conversation between tens of thousands of players happening in real-time.

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Chapter 2

The Toxic
(Counter)Culture
of Gaming

> **"Often the shock effect of offensive jokes is considered the hallmark"**

Gaming is not just a form of entertainment but has increasingly become a form of social interaction and a marker of identity, especially among boys and men.

A 2022 survey by Ungdoms-barometern, found that among boys and men aged 15—24, "gamer" was the most common identity marker. For girls in the same age group, "feminist" was at the top.[15]

Like other identity labels, the term "gamer" carries various implicit properties, behaviours, interests, etc. Gaming culture can be seen as a branch of the nerd tree.

Video games were long something that only children or nerds engaged in and was a hobby that was frequently mocked in popular culture. It was also an environment dominated by young white men. Since then, the popularity of video games has completely exploded into a common hobby, but the culture still bears traces of the "nerd era".

Many gamers consider themselves part of a counter-culture that in several aspects differs from what is described as "normie" culture, that is, those who do not spend their time online or in video games. This opposition in relation to "normal" culture also entails an aversion to everything perceived as politically correct ("PC") or feminist within the gaming space. These elements are seen as imposed upon, and as censorship of, the "genuine" gamer culture.

Racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic "jokes" in various formats, such as memes, are common in the gaming environment and are an important tool for normalising these types of ideas. The tone is harsh, and often the shock effect of offensive jokes is considered the hallmark. Swearing at and insulting both one's own and the opposing team is the norm, and harassment is a normal part of the culture.

Harassment and Racism

Sverok, a youth association for gamers, conducted a survey among Swedish players in 2022 revealing that the toxic gaming culture is a prevalent experience for the majority.[16] However, a major divide becomes apparent with

During a game, have you ever experienced offensive comments or jokes about...
(you can choose more than one answer)

- Boy
- Girl
- Non-binary & other
- Prefer not to answer

Your gender/gender identity	
The language you speak	
Your ethnicity	
Your skin colour	
Your religion	
Your culture	
Your sexuality	
Don't know	
No, never	

20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
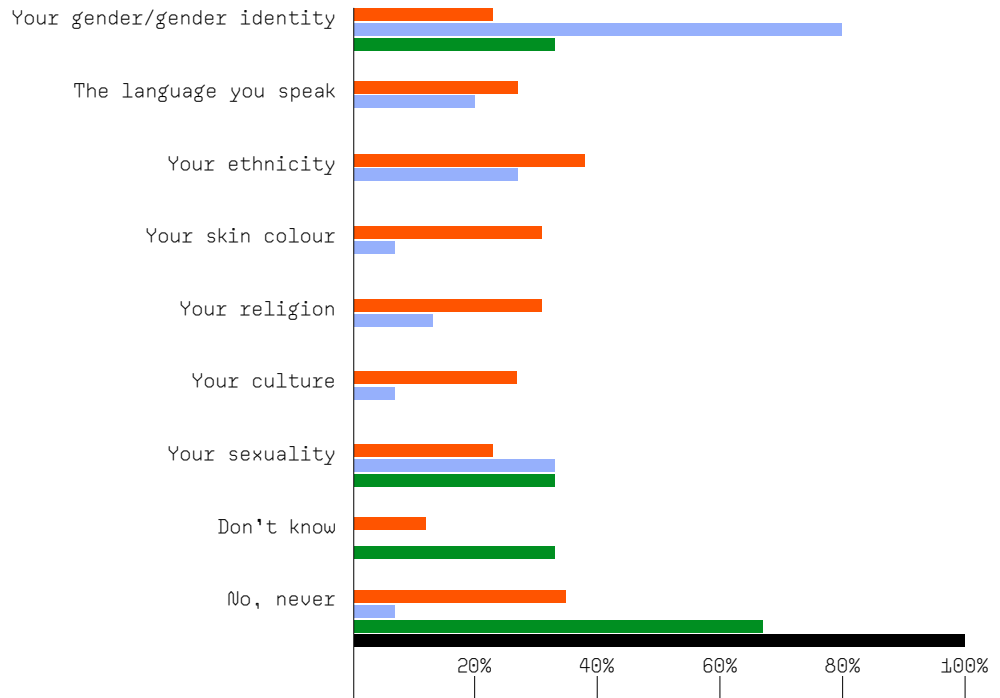
Source: Sverok (2022)

women predominantly reporting being harassed primarily based on gender/identity, while men more often encounter offensive statements about their ethnicity, skin colour, religion, and culture.[17]

A 2022 report by the AntiDefamation League (ADL), found that 30 percent of players in the study aged 13–17 chose to stop playing video games when they experienced harassment, while 35 percent chose to avoid certain types of games in order to avoid being exposed to hateful rhetoric and threats.[18] From the same group, 22 percent reported feeling discomfort or upset after playing video games, and even more notably, eight percent stated that they performed worse in school as a consequence of harassment they experienced in the games.[19]

Among adult players (18–45 years), 55 percent reported receiving threats of physical violence, and 46 percent had been subjected to sexual harassment.[20] As a consequence of the harassment they received, ten percent reported experiencing depressive or suicidal thoughts.[21]

It is clear that the normalisation of racist, sexist, and homophobic jokes has a negative effect on gaming as a hobby, as well as on the individuals affected.

Gamergate, Pizzagate, and the Alt-Right

An example of how the toxicity of gamer culture has manifested is the phenomenon known as "Gamergate", which started in the autumn of 2014. At that time, the conversation about women's presence and feminism within the gaming world had gained broad traction among players, as well as game developers, game journalists, and popular influencers.

Female game developers raised and received attention for their criticism of the male dominance in the industry and the lack of diversity among game developers and in the games themselves (personnel, characters, environments, narratives, etc.). A cultural change was beginning to take effect, where the total male dominance of the industry gradually began to loosen, and doors began to open for new

"Female game developers raised and received attention for their criticism of the male dominance in the industry"

perspectives and groups. But not all players viewed this development as a positive. A loosely organised group saw the process of change as artificial and imposed on gamers, as a consequence of a perceived emphasis on political correctness in traditional media. The trigger event was accusations and conspiracy theories based on the classic misogynistic myth that women exchange sexual services for career advancement.

The hate was initially directed at the feminist game developer Zoë Quinn, accused by her ex-boyfriend of having initiated a sexual relationship with a game journalist in exchange for positive reviews of her game "Depression Quest", an accusation that was completely false. However, the accuracy of these claims were of little importance for the audience that consumed them.

Quinn became the first of many women within the gaming environment affected by the movement to endure misogyny, death threats, threats against their family, rape threats, and was forced to leave their homes after their addresses were posted online. Gamergate also led to bomb threats being directed at public events where the affected women were to participate.

The Gamergate harassment campaign can also be linked to right-wing extremists who exploited the event as a learning opportunity for future political activities.

Mike Cernovich, a lawyer and gamer, was highly active and a leading figure within the Gamergate movement. He was seen as something of a de facto leader, to the extent that it is possible to lead a fragmented, decentralised online movement.

Zoë Quinn was the first victim of the hate campaign during "Gamergate".

Cernovich fueled the hate campaign against the affected women and used his professional role to legally harass them. He is also considered by many as one of the leading voices of "Pizzagate", a conspiracy theory alleging that politicians from the Democratic Party, particularly then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, were running a child sex ring in the basement of a pizzeria in Washington DC.[22] Cernovich supported Trump's 2016 presidential campaign (which expressed support and admiration for Cernovich's online activities) and used his newfound influence to aid Trump's journey to the White House.

There are also connections between individuals who were instrumental in Gamergate and the emerging alt-right movement founded by neo-nazi Richard Spencer. This movement, which Cernovich joined, organised the "Unite the Right" demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia, where

neo-nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and Proud Boys participated. During the event, a man deliberately drove his car into a group of counter-protesters, injuring 35 people and killing one.[23]

Gamergate should not be viewed as a one-off occurrence, but rather as a logical consequence of the ideological positions fostered within the gaming environment. The misogynistic and racist ideas that had been normalised within the gaming space found an outlet and could be translated into action. These sentiments manifested in the form of unprecedented harassment and severe sexism in a manner previously unseen in the gaming world, but which was undeniably not new to the environment as a whole.

The overlap with other adjacent online cultures emerged in a new hateful and violent way. However, they had long been present there.

Online Hate in Incel and Chan Cultures

Gaming culture exists alongside other internet cultures and online groups, with the boundaries between them not always being clear. There is a culture of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and racism shared by several of these subcultures on the internet, which also flows into gaming culture.

One such example is the relation with the _incel culture_ (i.e., involuntary celibates), which has gained increased attention from both the media and the public in recent years but has long grown on various online forums such as Reddit and Incels.co.

Gamer and incel cultures overlap to some extent, by virtue of both being online based, as well as the incel movement predominantly consisting of men in age groups where video games are a common pastime. There is clear misogyny and a sense of being an outcast and unwanted in society. Since incels often experience social exclusion and lack social interactions, digital socialisation is a natural alternative.

Another adjacent internet culture is _"chan culture"_, referring to the two discussion forums 4-Chan and 8-Chan. Both forums are notorious for their complete anonymity, and total lack of moderation or rules.

The forums do not have usernames, profiles, or similar features of other social forums. All users are automatically named "Anonymous" with a number sequence to differentiate users from each other. Hence, users refer to themselves and others as "Anon" or "Anons".

In chan culture, open Nazism is not only allowed but commonplace, and video recordings of violent acts such as mass shootings or executions are frequently posted. The forums are divided into different "boards" based on topics, with Pol (Politics), Anime, and Video Games being among the most popular, indicating the overlap between the political aspect of the culture and the interest in gaming.

Toxic Gaming Streamers

Today, the toxic tendencies within gaming culture are also reflected in many of the environment's most popular personalities. Several of them are characterised by sexist and homophobic attitudes which they normalise for their millions of followers, consisting primarily of young people. Thus, they are role models for a vast number of children and adolescents, but often display toxic and antagonistic behaviours that seemingly contribute to their popularity, particularly among young male gamers.

To map out and present a complete picture of this phenomenon would require its own report, but below follows a very brief summary of some of the most popular profiles that exemplify this phenomenon. For more detailed information and additional examples, see Expo's website.

XQC

XQC (Félix Lengyel) has 11.5 million followers on Twitch and is arguably the platform's most popular (English-speaking) gamer. XQC became popular during his time in Overwatch when he both streamed on Twitch and played professionally in the esports league Overwatch League.

XQC is notorious for his hateful outbursts against others in the game and has been suspended several times both from Twitch and from esports leagues. He is often accused of homophobia or sexism due to his statements against others on Twitch.

Adin Ross

Adin Ross had 7.1 million followers on Twitch before the platform banned him. He is known for both IRL and gaming streams. Adin Ross is friends with Andrew Tate and has frequently featured him in live-streams. Ross regards Tate as a role model and denies any criminal wrongdoing on Tate's part or acknowledging that his views on women are problematic. Ross switched to the competing platform Kick, where he showed porn to his underage audience, offered a follower a substantial sum of money to pour urine on his sister who disliked Tate, and engaged with neo-Nazi Nick Fuentes during a live broadcast, thereby spreading right-wing extremist propaganda to tens of thousands of viewers.

ISHOWSPEED

ISHOWSPEED, real name Darren Watkins Jr, was one of the fastest-growing channels on Twitch before the platform banned him after he threatened a woman with rape during a live video call. After this incident, he moved to YouTube. During his live-streamed gaming sessions on the platform, he has repeatedly harassed female gamers. Despite this, he now has 18.7 million subscribers on YouTube where he regularly publishes videos and live-streams.

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Chapter 3

Right-Wing Extremism in the Gaming World

"The internet facilitated the ability to find and communicate with like-minded individuals completely anonymously"

Right-wing extremist movements have a history of infiltrating and hijacking new youth driven cultures. In the 70s and 80s, a new counter-culture emerged revolving around alcohol consumption, music, and brawling. This culture was nihilistic, violent, and dominated by white, young men. It didn't take long before the environment was politicised, and the skinheads became a new right-wing extremist subculture. In the 2000s, cassette tapes and white power concerts were replaced by video games and chat forums.

Right-wing extremists were also early in understanding the value of the internet and quickly utilised it in a powerful way. Internet forums and chats offered anonymity, and in the beginning of their emergence, there was almost a total lack of regulation and moderation, factors that made it an attractive new tool. The internet facilitated the ability to find and communicate with like-minded individuals completely anonymously.

It's these same factors that make the gaming environment an attractive space for right-wing extremists. Messages can reach a large group, predominantly young people, with the only real investment being the gaming account. Those who are banned from a game can easily create a new account and continue in the same way, especially if the game in question is free, which is often true for many popular games that target the younger players.

Online games with open text and voice chats become easy forums for spreading racist, sexist, and homophobic messages to a large audience. A 2021 survey published by the ADL (Anti Defamation League) revealed that eight percent of American gamers aged 18—45 had come into contact with propaganda or messaging related to white power ideology in multiplayer games like World of Warcraft, Fortnite, Apex Legends, League of Legends, and Call of Duty.[24] When the same question was asked in a follow-up report in 2022, that number had increased to 20 percent for 18—45-year-olds and 15 percent for 10—17-year-olds.[25]

A 2023 study from New York University found that extremist actors exploit and hijack gaming platforms to spread hateful and violent rhetoric.[26] The study also included a questionnaire answered by over a thousand players from the USA, France, the UK, South Korea, and Germany. The respondents' answers showed that 51 percent of gamers had been exposed to extremist content in online games.[27]

The study identified six online multiplayer games where white power messages were most frequent: Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto V Online, Valorant, World of Warcraft, Fortnite, and Player Unknown's Battlegrounds.[28] The numbers show that right-wing extremism has a palpable presence within the gaming world, with the potential to reach millions of players.
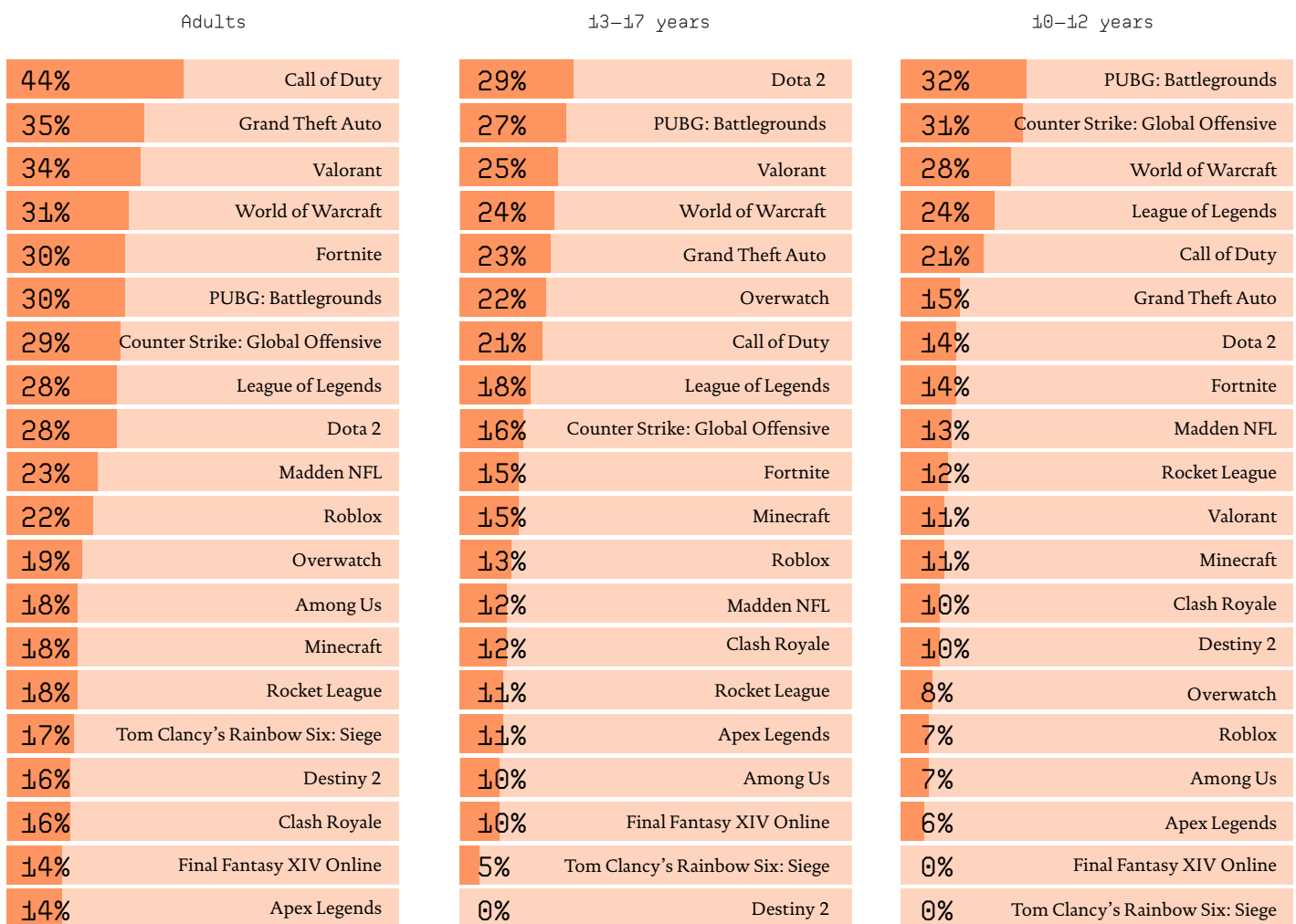
The gaming world includes various tools that right-wing extremists can misuse in several ways. One example is voice chat, prevalent in most games, facilitating voice communication between players. Discord and Steam also have voice chats, enabling players to talk to each other outside the games they are actively playing.

White-Supremacist Extremist Experiences, by Game

Share of people who reported experiencing white-supremacist extremism in the following games, by age group

Source: ADL (2022)

Adults		13–17 years		10–12 years	
44%	Call of Duty	29%	Dota 2	32%	PUBG: Battlegrounds
35%	Grand Theft Auto	27%	PUBG: Battlegrounds	31%	Counter Strike: Global Offensive
34%	Valorant	25%	Valorant	28%	World of Warcraft
31%	World of Warcraft	24%	World of Warcraft	24%	League of Legends
30%	Fortnite	23%	Grand Theft Auto	21%	Call of Duty
30%	PUBG: Battlegrounds	22%	Overwatch	15%	Grand Theft Auto
29%	Counter Strike: Global Offensive	21%	Call of Duty	14%	Dota 2
28%	League of Legends	18%	League of Legends	14%	Fortnite
28%	Dota 2	16%	Counter Strike: Global Offensive	13%	Madden NFL
23%	Madden NFL	15%	Fortnite	12%	Rocket League
22%	Roblox	15%	Minecraft	11%	Valorant
19%	Overwatch	13%	Roblox	11%	Minecraft
18%	Among Us	12%	Madden NFL	10%	Clash Royale
18%	Minecraft	12%	Clash Royale	10%	Destiny 2
18%	Rocket League	11%	Rocket League	8%	Overwatch
17%	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege	11%	Apex Legends	7%	Roblox
16%	Destiny 2	10%	Among Us	7%	Among Us
16%	Clash Royale	10%	Final Fantasy XIV Online	6%	Apex Legends
14%	Final Fantasy XIV Online	5%	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege	0%	Final Fantasy XIV Online
14%	Apex Legends	0%	Destiny 2	0%	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege

The ability to talk with friends is of course a positive thing, but moderating these chats is complicated. Unlike text chats, gaming companies have not yet implemented any form of automatic moderation that, for example, automatically deletes certain words in text chats. Suggestions, such as recording all voice calls within games for manual moderation afterward, where reports of harassment can be examined, or using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to listen in order to counteract bad behaviour in the games, have been met with resistance and sparked controversy. In August 2023, Activision announced that they are releasing AI-generated moderation of voice chat in conjunction with the launch of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 in November that same year.

Anonymity and Lack of Moderation

All game adjacent platforms, such as Discord, Twitch and Steam, are free to download and use. This is also the case for many games that are primarily aimed at younger children, such as Fortnite and Roblox. This means that the threshold onto the platform is non-existent.

The availability of free games or game-adjacent platforms is not inherently a negative thing. The problems arise when right-wing extremists exploit this to hijack and misuse the technology for their own objectives. The anonymity offered by usernames and gaming accounts adds another advantageous component. Distributing links to right-wing extremist content from an account that does not disclose one's real identity is much easier and may be perceived as an action with less associated risk for social or economic consequences than, for instance, handing out leaflets with equivalent content on the street.

In combination with anonymity, gaming and game-adjacent platforms also offer an infrastructure that gives right-wing extremists the conditions to conduct operational activities. Many of the platforms have weak moderation yet are easy for new users to grasp, all while being popular and therefore used by many.

On Discord, classified American documents were published across multiple channels, remaining undiscovered by the platform for several weeks.[29] Hence, there is potential for extremists to exploit and hijack even this technology for their own purposes.

Operational activities, such as spreading information about right-wing extremist organisations or ideology, providing instructions to members, or coordinating attacks, can easily take place within these spaces. Right-wing extremist groups can reasonably be expected to use these platforms to conduct their main activities.

Lack of Adult Oversight in the Gaming World

Other factors in the gaming space that favour right-wing extremist presence are the lack of insight from or presence of parents or other adults. Many adults play video games, but are rarely present in the games in the capacity of guardians for children and adolescents in the environment. For this reason, right-wing extremists can gain unhindered access to children without any insight from their adult custodians.

All these factors combined with the enormous potential audience make the gaming world very attractive for right-wing extremist actors.

Right-Wing Extremists Meet on Children's Platforms

Not all right-wing extremists frequenting the gaming space do so with the intent of recruiting or radicalising others. Gaming, being an immensely popular hobby, attracts players with diverse ideological beliefs. Some right-wing extremist individuals or groups play together as a form of social interaction. This occurs in both closed and open channels, where the content is accessible to a broad audience.

An example of this is Steam groups, a social function on the gaming platform Steam. There, users can create groups, either for their friends or for a broader audience, such as for players of the same game. The function has been exploited to signal and strengthen political affiliations, as exemplified by Alternative for Sweden (AfS), which has a Steam group where users celebrate their proud Swedish identity.

Socialising with other right-wing extremists poses a risk for democratic society as it allows them to strengthen each other in their ideological beliefs, which can accelerate or intensify further radicalization. This is problematic in itself, but when this socialisation occurs side by side with children it becomes particularly concerning.

The right-wing extremists' meeting places are located in the same environment and on the same platforms that children and adolescents visit every day. Children who have never before encountered political extremism risk coming into direct contact with those who wish to increase its influence.

Normalisation of Hate

These spaces for socialisation, such as a Discord server accessed through an invitation, can later become valuable for furthering opinion and recruitment. Right-wing extremist groups get the chance to invest time and opportunity to build up a community and create a fun virtual hangout with active members. This can then be used to invite new players into.

Thanks to Discord's well-developed platform, all ideological material, propaganda, and discussions published in the server can be archived and prepared so that it is organised and accessible for new members to easily consume. All the ideological material can be seamlessly interwoven with discussions and content about gaming, the platform's actual purpose.

Accepting right-wing extremist actors within the gaming world means an increased risk that their ideological messages and opinions become normalised. Normalisation occurs when views that violate democratic norms, such as discrimination based on gender identity, sexuality, or ethnic background, become so commonplace that they are perceived by the surrounding environment as "normal", on par with other opinions entitled to equal expression.

This gives right-wing extremists the opportunity to normalise hateful opinions in an environment that is unusually receptive to this type of rhetoric. This setting enables opinion-shaping among adolescents and children who lack the knowledge or tools to counter the forces to which they are exposed.

Humour and Irony as a Cover for Extremism

Right-wing extremism possesses an ideological flexibility and populist features that enables them to quickly pick up new, or discard aspects of their worldview as needed. When a new political issue rises high on the social debate's agenda, the far-right is quick to adjust their rhetoric and refocus. In this way, they can reach new target groups that have not been receptive to other extremist talking points but are swept along in this. A current example is how the rights of transgender people have become a contentious issue, causing polarisation and one in which the far-right clearly profiles itself within.[30]

Right-wing extremists have long been adept at using visual imagery to convey their opinions, a practice well-suited for online culture. One example of this is the explosion of extremist memes that were spread online depicting "Pepe the Frog" during the American presidential election in 2016, and how the alt-right movement in the USA used it to spread Nazi propaganda.[31]

The way the frog was used clearly shows how right-wing extremists can hijack images and effectively use them for their own agenda. The creator of Pepe was so horrified by how his creation was misused, that he chose to kill off the character in his own comic strip.

Both 4- and 8-Chan were early in adopting Pepe the Frog as a symbol for their culture, and the frog remains the most common and popular character figure on the forums. Users often use various versions of Pepe as a way to portray their own reaction or feeling about the topic being discussed. Today, Pepe in various formats is the most common emote on Twitch and an integral part of gaming culture.

The gaming world heavily relies on memes, gifs, emotes, and other forms of digital image and video

"Pepe the Frog" has taken on many forms, some of which are linked to right-wing extremism.

language. Therefore, right-wing extremist propaganda and myths can be intertwined with humour and gaming terminology to establish a perceived community and cohesion between the two.

Another example is the concept of "NPC" (Non-Player Character), referring to computer-controlled characters in video games that are not played by another real person. Right-wing extremists have hijacked this term to denote opponents or people who do not share their worldview, in an effort to dehumanise them and label them as non-thinking non-humans.[32]

This creates a language usage that overlaps gaming culture with right-wing extremism. It may create the illusion that these two groups are closely aligned or share commonalities, a perception that can subsequently be exploited to create space for increasingly radical messages.

Gaming offers right-wing extremists and other players a common interest. It is easier to form bonds around gaming than, for example, anti-semitic

conspiracy theories. By publishing messages or imagery in the form of memes using terminology and aesthetics from gaming culture, extremist propaganda can be shared and spread under the guise of being ironic or provocative humour.

Using a popular existing meme format to convey extreme and hateful views is a way to camouflage and find common ground in the form of internet-based inside humour. It lowers the threshold for consuming and spreading this type of material.[33]

The strategy has proven to be very effective as it makes it difficult to discern whether the content is sincerely intended or a clumsily attempted form of humour. It provides the individual with a perpetual shield to hide behind in case someone questions the content.

The problem is twofold. Firstly, offensive humour that is derogatory towards women and minorities, already a problem within the gaming world, becomes normalised. Secondly, it enables
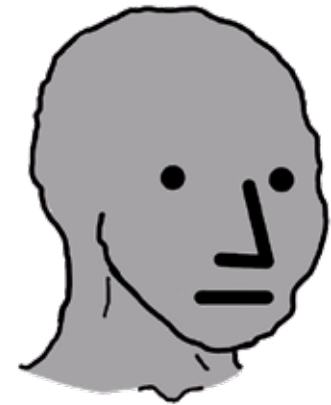
The term NPC (Non-Player Character) is used to describe a person who does not think for themselves but follows others' opinions. The above image is a gray-colored variant of the popular meme format "wojak".

right-wing extremists to blend in and spread propaganda to children and adolescents unobstructed.

This phenomenon gave rise to the following popular meme: The meme exemplifies the

"Gaming offers right-wing extremists and other players a common interest"

confusion that can arise when racism is normalised to the extent that many perceive it as a natural part of the cultural humour or language used, only to later discover that there are individuals who are not joking but actually hold genuine, racist views.

Besides the propagandaification of gaming references through the spread of disguised, extremist memes, right-wing extremists can come into direct contact with children and youth at an individual level.

Friendships, both online and offline, often arise from shared interests. The common interest provides individuals something to talk about and do together, in this case, playing video games. From this interaction, trust and camaraderie can develop. Right-wing extremists can then use this as a gateway, where the friendship moves to more closed off, private channels that are safer for sharing their ideological beliefs. This need not necessarily be a conscious, planned, or organised action but can occur organically.

It is natural to open up more about one's views as a friendship deepens. The trust that has already been built can be exploited to share right-wing extremist material and views in an attempt to recruit and radicalise the recipient.

The ideological opinion formation conducted online does not stay there. Should the recipient in question be convinced by right-wing extremist propaganda, it means that this individual carries these hateful views out into society.

In extreme cases where the propagandisation and recruitment are successful, the ideological propaganda can potentially lead to radicalisation, wherein the

individual in question may plan to commit, or indeed commit an act of violence. For a more in-depth discussion on radicalisation and recruitment, see report 2.

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Chapter 4

The Risks of Right-Wing Extremist Presence

The impact of right-wing extremist presence in the gaming world varies depending on who is exposed to their propaganda and influence attempts. This chapter provides a summarising overview of the potential risks and how different parts of this space are affected based on the empirical evidence presented.

The risks identified by the project are divided into four categories, based on the actors or groups they primarily affect: targets, target audience, the gaming industry, and society. In essence, young gamers can be divided into two groups from the point of view of right-wing extremists: the "target audience" and the vulnerable group of "targets".

The "target audience" refers to those whom extremists wish to recruit or influence by exposing them to and normalising right-wing extremist ideas and messages. The vulnerable group, "targets", on the other hand, are those who face hate and threats, such as ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women, portrayed as a common enemy or used to project various problems onto. They are presented as the cause of the problems that many young men experience, such as social exclusion, loneliness, and economic difficulties.

Risks for the "Targets" (those affected)

The risks associated with the presence of right-wing extremists for the targets are obvious. They risk being exposed to more frequent discrimination, harassment, or various forms of hate speech and threats based on factors such as their ethnic background, sexuality, gender identity, or religious beliefs.
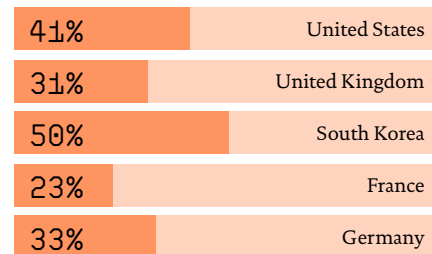
Right-wing extremist ideology casts as "other" and dehumanises women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racial groups, normalising harassment and, at its most severe, leads to violence against these groups. Consequently, gaming ceases to be a fun or an accessible hobby for many, especially adolescents, who identify with or are perceived to belong to one of these groups. This exclusion denies them access to important social meeting places and deprives them of the opportunity to form valuable social connections worldwide.
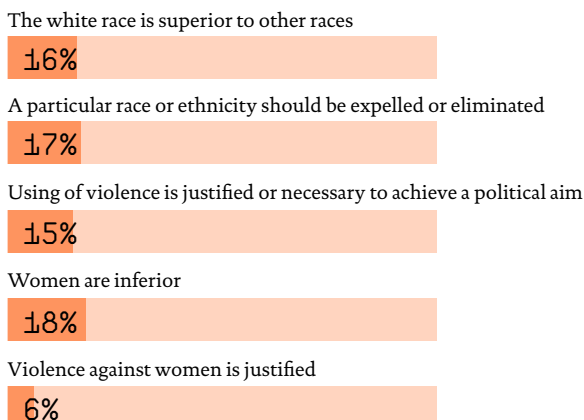
Encounters with Extremism

Percentage of respondents who came across statements supporting the use of physical violence against a particular person or group based on their identity:
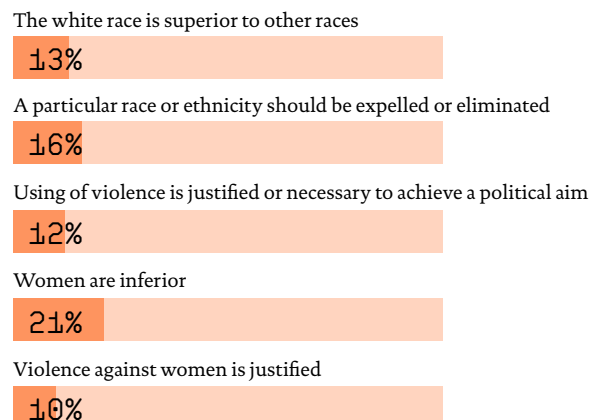
%	Country
35%	United States
25%	United Kingdom
30%	South Korea
25%	France
29%	Germany
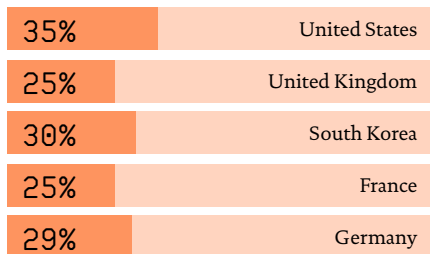
Percentage of respondents who came across statements portraying a particular ethnic, gender, or religious group as inferior:

%	Country
41%	United States
31%	United Kingdom
50%	South Korea
23%	France
33%	Germany

Percentage of respondents under 18 who came across statements expressing support for the idea that:

The white race is superior to other races
16%

A particular race or ethnicity should be expelled or eliminated
17%

Using of violence is justified or necessary to achieve a political aim
15%

Women are inferior
18%

Violence against women is justified
6%

Percentage of respondents 18 and over who came across statements expressing support for the idea that:

The white race is superior to other races
13%

A particular race or ethnicity should be expelled or eliminated
16%

Using of violence is justified or necessary to achieve a political aim
12%

Women are inferior
21%

Violence against women is justified
10%

Source: Rosenblat, Mariana Olaizola, and Barrett, Paul M. (2023)

Moreover, the consequences of this online segregation risk extending far beyond the gaming world. In online forums where racist and hateful opinions are expressed without opposition, there is a risk that these views could gain a larger foothold within a broader group, subsequently having implications for society as a whole. Right-wing extremist propaganda largely relies on dehumanising and demonising various groups, but this is hindered when people perceived as representatives of these groups are present in the environment.

If targets are driven away from these spaces crucial for the social interaction of young people, and the spread of racist, sexist, and homophobic messages can occur without being refuted, the process of normalisation can accelerate.

Risks for the "Target Audience" (recruitment base)

For the target audience, the risks look different. These are adolescents perceived as potentially receptive to right-wing extremist propaganda and attempts at radicalization.

Their vulnerability, in terms of possible social exclusion, can be exploited in order to recruit and radicalise them. For many who play video games, it is a way to escape reality and immerse themselves in a new world for a few hours. For some, it is also an opportunity to find friends that they may not have at school or other social contexts in their lives.

This is undoubtedly one of the most fantastic aspects of gaming as a hobby. Every video game offers new potential friends whom you might never have met otherwise. The offer of a social circle can be very enticing when there is a lack of social

contexts in other aspects of life. The gaming environment already has an elevated tolerance for racism, sexism, and homophobia, and therefore such comments can be made without raising any eyebrows. Friendships formed through gaming can then transition to private chats and shift to discussions about topics no longer related to video games.

In closed channels like private Discord servers, where right-wing extremism goes unchallenged by opponents or authorities such as teachers, parents, role models, etc., participants risk being reinforced in their racist and misogynistic beliefs. They strengthen their sense of community and cohesion, all while confirming each other's extremist worldview. This can pose significant risks to the targeted groups as well as the rest of society, as right-wing extremist propaganda lowers the threshold for, as well as glorifies, violence.

Acceptance for, or even encouragement of, participation in the

Image from the police investigation protocol of the school attack in Eslöv 2021. The photo is taken in the perpetrator's room.
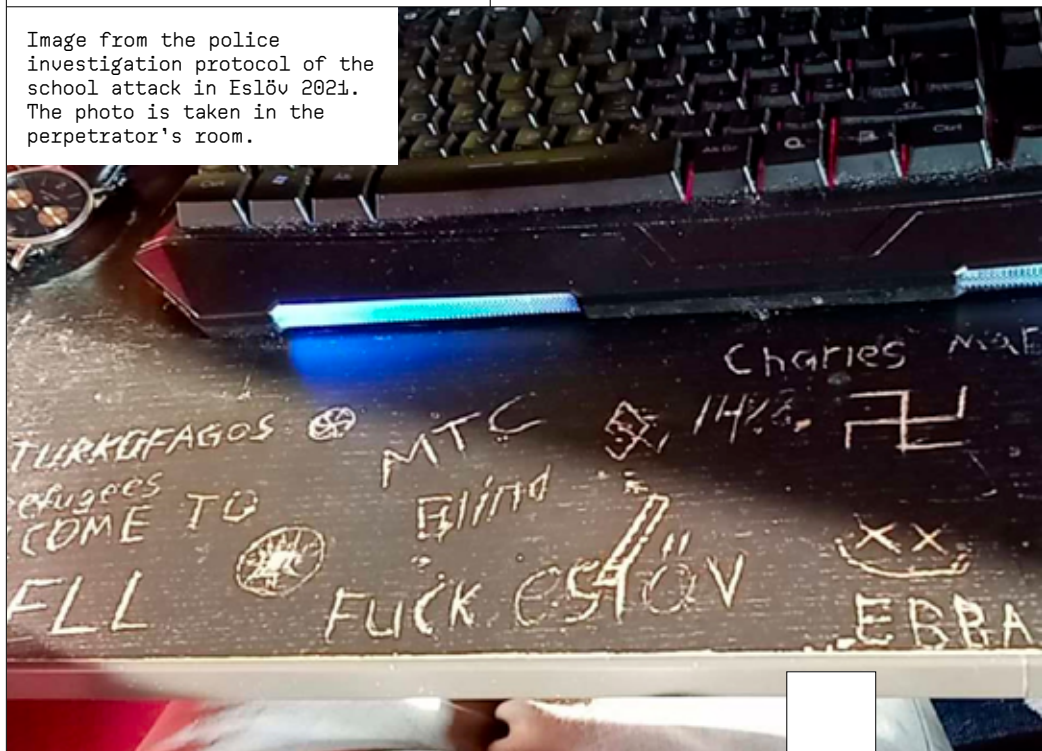
planning or execution of violent ideologically motivated acts are common in right-wing extremist ideology. Factors such as a sense of alienation or similar issues that may have led to a person's recruitment, risk resulting in outright isolation from the wider society due to adopting ideological convictions that demonises significant portions of the democratic society and its inhabitants.

The original problem that right-wing extremists offer a solution to, the exclusion, is instead significantly exacerbated, and the way out becomes longer and more complicated.

Risks for the Gaming Industry

A real risk for the gaming industry, should moderation and preventive work against right-wing extremist propaganda in their channels continue to be deficient, is that the affected may choose to leave the environment. If individuals find themselves unable to stay in a game

or platform without having to endure hate, threats, and harassment, it is only natural that they would choose to avoid these spaces.

For the gaming companies themselves, this could mean a loss of income as these players no longer purchase or use the companies' products. Furthermore, it also risks segregating the gaming environment, where extremist views are met with less or no resistance at all. This way, echo chambers can be created where extreme messages are normalised and go unchallenged. This, in turn, could reinforce extremists in their beliefs.

Young people who stumble into these contexts are then exposed to hateful messages that go completely unchallenged. Parents, who often control access to video games and other gaming products, may reasonably resist allowing their child to be in an environment where the child's safety cannot be guaranteed. This would also increase demands from various voter groups for political decisions regulating the industry and restricting gaming companies' freedom of action.

Likewise, physical meeting places such as exhibitions, gaming conventions, gaming cafes, LAN (Local Area Network) events, etc., would be a much less attractive place for targets to be in. Recent surveys show that women make up almost half of all gamers. It is obvious that if half of all potential customers cannot be guaranteed a safe environment free from harassment, choosing to avoid consuming products or paying entry tickets to visit physical gatherings, would mean significantly reduced income opportunities.

A segregated and unrestrained space within gaming where right-wing extremists have free rein risks escalating the problem. This could potentially lead to gaming culture developing in a more extreme direction, further damaging the reputation of video games as a legitimate hobby.

Risks for Society at Large

In addition to the risks the right-wing extremist presence poses to individual players and the gaming industry, it also creates risks for the wider society. Right-wing extremist ideology is fundamentally anti-democratic. The extent varies, as the term right-wing extremism encompasses a whole range of different radical worldviews.

At the lower end of the spectrum, this anti-democratic disposition may manifest through support for the prohibition of same-sex marriages, advocating for abortion bans, or the reinstatement of forced labour and capital punishment. For more extreme groups, it is evidenced by even more severe infringements on people's rights, such as denying women's suffrage, banning marriages between white and non-white individuals, or the criminalisation of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The greater the foothold and influence this extremist ideology gains in a society, the greater the threat to liberal democracy it becomes. The process of radicalisation and the recruitment of new individuals, who can then reinforce each other's anti-democratic beliefs through socialisation, have the potential to create strong, or even violent, conflicts between different social groups. Increased radicalisation can also, in extreme cases, increase the risk of ideologically motivated violent acts.

One of the reasons why the gaming environment has the potential to become a breeding ground for radicalisation is that the gaming space largely flies under the radar for many legislators, researchers, and civil society. Regulations on social media seldom encompass gaming or gaming-related platforms, despite much indicating that it is at least as important of a social space for many adolescents as traditional social media.

Infractions against national laws can often be difficult to investigate, given that the game studio, parent company, servers, and players often operate in entirely different geographical and legal jurisdictions. This complexity creates difficulties for authorities to investigate crimes committed and for the formulation of national legislation to address the problem.

Another central aspect of the problem from a societal perspective is that the right-wing extremists have the opportunity to exploit platforms and influence or hijack cultural youth identities like "gamer" as many adults lack knowledge about it. Many of the actors within civil society working to combat violent extremism, as well as parents wishing to protect their children from hate and threats, may never have themselves spent time in the gaming space and therefore have limited insight into the forums and platforms that right-wing extremists hijack and exploit.

This challenge makes it difficult for key actors to understand the factors and dynamics underpinning the problem they are tasked with combating. Without the right knowledge, it is nearly impossible to develop effective countermeasures and preventive solutions. This will be discussed in depth in the third and final report in this report series.

Uniting to Change the Gaming Space
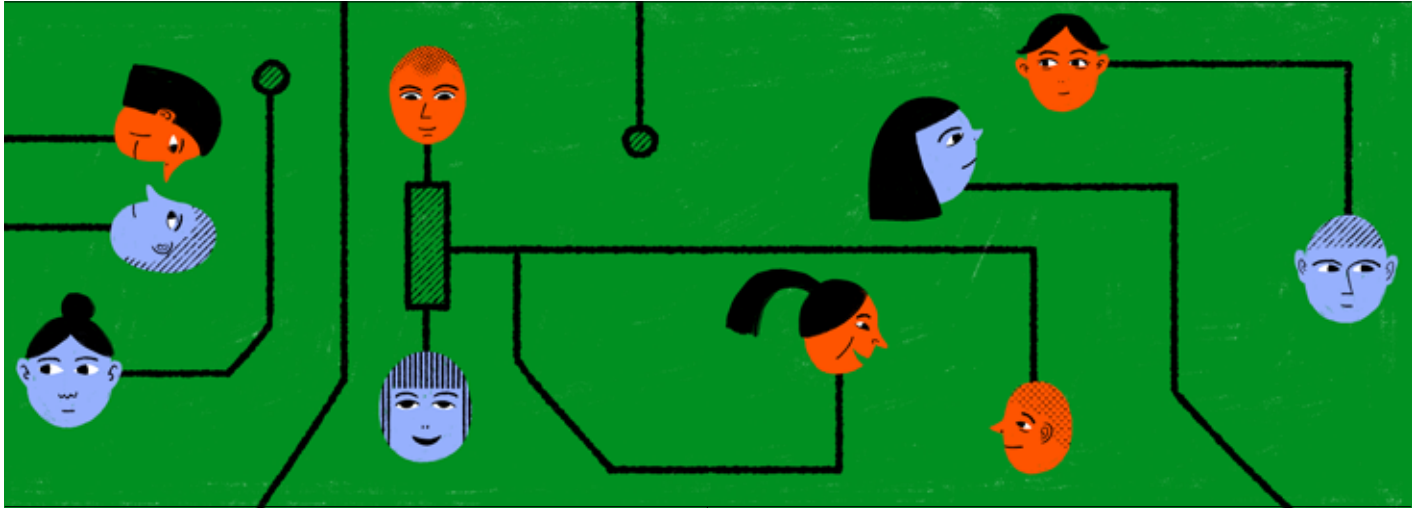
The gaming space is a vital social meeting place for many children and adolescents. It offers positive aspects like creativity, inspiration, and extensive social exchange.

It is clearly an environment that must be safeguarded, ensuring its safety and accessibility for all. Democratic, inclusive principles need to permeate the community and the multitude of conversations and exchanges that take place there. Anti-democratic forces should never gain ground and influence in society, least of all where those with the least ability to defend themselves are present.

The presence of right-wing extremism within the gaming world is evident and alarming. Based on the presented empirical data, it is clear that right-wing extremists have already established themselves within the gaming world and are spreading their messages to players and within the larger gaming community. Research indicated a significant increase in the proportion of players encountering messages about white power (right-wing extremism) in games, more than doubling from 2021 to 2022.

The problems associated with this must be understood within the context of gaming culture's own struggles with hateful and discriminatory tendencies. The "Gamergate" phenomenon serves as an illustrative example on how these toxic tendencies in gaming culture could lead to extensive harassment and threats against women and other marginalised groups within the gaming world.

The gaming environment could potentially become a breeding ground for radicalisation, given its lower regulation compared to other social media platforms, something that can be exploited by right-wing extremists. The gaming space is a relatively new arena, and the lack of knowledge and understanding within civil society and among parents needs to be addressed as part of effectively combating right-wing extremism.

The risks of the right-wing extremist presence are clear and pose a threat to various groups as well as society as a whole. It exposes those affected, the "targets", to heightened instances of discrimination, harassment, and threats based on their ethnicity, sexuality, gender, or religious beliefs.

Right-wing extremism is an anti-democratic ideology where LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and racialized groups are particularly vulnerable and dehumanised. By normalising harassment and hate against these groups, players risk carrying these attitudes into the rest of their lives and therefore out into wider society.

Moreover, there is an increased risk of recruitment and radicalisation of the so-called "target audience", i.e., players that extremists wish to recruit or influence through propaganda. The gaming world is an important place where adolescents seek social community and friends. As such, it becomes easy for right-wing extremists to exploit those who are in a vulnerable situation or feel excluded, to radicalise them or strengthen extremist beliefs. Closed channels and private Discord servers offer an environment where

these beliefs can be affirmed and reinforced without encountering opposition.

Furthermore, the presence of right-wing extremists in the gaming environment poses a potential risk to the gaming industry itself. If moderation and preventive work against right-wing extremism are not improved, it risks becoming an unwelcoming place for vulnerable groups, thereby promoting segregation and exclusion. Affected individuals may opt to leave the environment, which could result in lost revenues for companies. Moreover, a segregated environment where extremist views have free rein could lead to further normalisation of these messages, establishing echo chambers where hateful and violent views thrive.

Nevertheless, the greatest concern is the risks that right-wing extremist presence in the gaming environment poses to society as a whole. The anti-democratic nature of right-wing extremist ideology can lead to increased polarisation in society, presenting a broader threat to liberal democracy. If extremist messages become normalised and spread more widely within the gaming world, it could lead to increased ideologically motivated violence and conflicts between different social groups. This runs parallel to an increase in radicalisation among young men, which could be exacerbated due to the presence of right-wing extremism in the gaming world.

Addressing these issues requires collaboration between the gaming industry, players, researchers, civil society, and authorities to actively counteract and combat the spread of right-wing extremist messages within gaming culture. It is of utmost importance to create an inclusive and safe gaming environment where all players feel welcome and respected, and where extremist views and actions are not tolerated.

Only through a collective effort can we build a gaming culture that promotes positive values and contributes to a more democratic and cohesive society.

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