

Towards a Political Economy of Gamergate

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses feminist and intersectional political economy to examine the political and economic outcomes of Gamergate: who gained or lost power and capital, and who ultimately paid for it. This paper argues that Gamergate was a critical moment for the far-right to determine how to bring about the change they wanted to see in the world by weaponizing simplistic culture wars and memetic language that would redirect the attention Gamergate was paying to feminists in video games to politics at large. Demonstrating how simplified culture wars and viral media can redirect attention from niche cultural debates to international politics. This was facilitated via an infrastructure of websites, social media platforms, streaming services, image boards, and media companies associated with conservative movements, and it directly led to both elections of President Donald Trump.

Keywords

Gamergate, politics, political economy, gender, intersectionality

INTRODUCTION

On October 27th, 2025, the official White House Twitter (X) account shared an AI-generated image of President Trump standing in front of the White House, saluting a large American flag. While this format has become typical fodder for the President's various social media accounts, this post was hailing a particular audience: gamers. In the image (figure 1), Trump is dressed as Bungie's super-soldier character, Master Chief, from the Halo (2001-2021) series of video games. The post is captioned "Power to the Players," the slogan of U.S. video game retailer GameStop. For context, The Official White House account links to a GameStop post that includes a mock executive order declaring that the "console wars" are over because the newest Halo installment, Halo: Campaign Evolved (2026), would not be an Xbox exclusive, unlike previous titles in the series. GameStop clarified that it would now operate as a "demilitarized zone." The faux Executive Order was then shared by the White House Rapid Response account with the addition, "President Trump presides over the end of the 20-year Console Wars," leading to a running joke that the console wars were simply the most recent war that Trump has "ended" (McFall, 2025).

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Figure 1: An AI-generated image of President Trump as Master Chief shared from The White House Twitter (X) account.

While this post may be ridiculous, it was the much less offensive post referencing Halo coming out of the President's office that day. The Homeland Security Twitter (X) account shared an AI-generated image (figure 2) of a super-soldier (presumably Master Chief) manning a large automatic weapon on the back of a "Warthog" (a Jeep/Hummer-like military vehicle) with the caption "DESTROY THE FLOOD" and a directive to the website join.ice.gov. The post was also shared from the official White House and Department of Homeland Security Instagram accounts and currently has over 29 million views and 98K likes on X, and over 48K likes on Instagram.

Knowing any of Halo's lore or backstory takes this post from a recruitment advertisement weaponizing gamer nostalgia to a white supremacist dog whistle. In the world of the Halo games, the "Flood" is an alien antagonist with a networked hive mind, a cross between a parasitic fungus and Star Trek's "Borg." There is only one way to deal with the Flood truly, and that is to kill off all life on the planet. As Pamela Maria Schmidt and Sid Heeg explain:

No matter how many times the player kills the Flood-infected combatants, they will become reinfected and reanimated over, and over again. The only solution to defeating them is by eliminating their food source, which happens to be all sentient life in the galaxy—a planned and purposeful genocide (2026).

It is because of these narrative implications that many were horrified by the use of both Halo and the Flood in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) recruitment. It is worth noting that "Finish the Fight" was the tagline for the Halo 3 launch, as well as the name of the beloved score featured in the Halo 3 Announcement trailer. The

trailer itself is a call to heroic action, which is being evoked in these social media recruitment campaigns. The goal of the Halo games is, simply put, to protect humanity by fighting off alien threats to prevent this potential genocide via the “Halos,” which would kill all mortal life in the galaxy. In other words, the Department of Homeland Security is positioning those living in America who are either undocumented or deemed as “other” (visitors, tourists, and U.S. citizens who oppose the administration) as an existential threat to humanity that needs to be eliminated.



Figure 2: An AI-generated image shared from the Department of Homeland Security Twitter (X) account featuring a Warthog with an automatic weapon on top. There is text overlaid reading “DESTROY THE FLOOD JOIN.ICE.GOV.” The image is captioned with “Finishing this fight.”

These memes are one tiny example of how governments and other actors can use games and games culture to gain engagement and secure control over a narrative by aligning oneself with something that seems “fun” and nonthreatening. In 2026, we see Trump’s team and supporters using the “meme war” tactics perfected during Gamergate to increase support for ICE and other white supremacist policies (Donovan et al, 2022).

GAMERGATE

Gamergate itself was a type of “civil war” between two factions of the video game community: those who opposed so-called “woke” and “political” games and games culture, and those who advocated a feminist and anti-racist shift in games and games culture (Massanari, 2025; O’Donnell, 2022; Quinn, 2017; Vossen, 2018; Vossen, 2020). Gamergate framed itself as a bottom-up consumer revolt against perceived power and corruption in games journalism (often targeted at feminist critics and developers), only to be co-opted by actually powerful forces behind the Alt-right and Far-right movements (Bratich, 2022; Donovan et al., 2022; Massanari, 2024; O’Donnell, 2022; Quinn, 2017; Vossen, 2018; Waldman, 2017). The far-right has succeeded in using Gamergate and adjacent culture wars as Trojan horses that pull those who previously claimed not to care about politics into their larger movement. I provide specific examples of this when discussing key actors below. Gamergate therefore became the blueprint for how to utilize a culture war to distract from (or gain support for) the global rise of fascism as well as how to build and solidify economic and political power through the internet. I argue that without Gamergate, most people would never have heard of *Breitbart News* or Steve Bannon; there would be no QAnon, no Pizzagate, no 8chan, and no Trump presidency.

While there has been substantial academic attention to Gamergate, beginning in 2014 and continuing today, the movement's distributed nature means that many questions remain unanswered. This is in part because many scholars, myself included, were implicated in these struggles and were attempting to understand this phenomenon from a situated position as a target of harassment (Vossen, 2018). In my current work, I examine the material conditions that led to Gamergate and that Gamergate then created. This is in direct contrast to my previous (no less important) work that examined the more affective and personal dimensions of Gamergate in the months and years immediately following the Fall of 2014 (Gray et al., 2018; Vossen, 2014; Vossen, 2016; Vossen, 2018; Vossen 2020). Over a decade later, Gamergate still impacts us all daily, but because the internet (and world events) has moved at such a rapid pace, it is, at the end of the day, now history. Therefore, we, as game scholars, need to tell the story of Gamergate as history, in the context of everything that has happened since.

As Woodcock explains in *Marx at the Arcade*:

From Gamergate to the alt-right, we can no longer ignore videogames as a field of cultural struggle. This does not call for censoring videogames, but rather for understanding that battles of ideas are won and lost on this terrain (2019, 162-163).

I hope my ongoing research will serve as a historical account of these battles, examining the terrain and the lives of those on both sides of the culture war. The goal of this project is to create an understanding of how the events of Gamergate contributed to the erosion of American democracy, the global rise of conspiracy theories, the erosion of trust in experts, and the spread of misinformation. The goal of this paper is to share a small portion of this work.

TOWARDS

I titled this article “Towards a Political Economy of Gamergate” because it is a high-level introduction to the work that I plan to undertake over several years, culminating in a manuscript that tells the complex story of Gamergate and its long-lasting political

and economic consequences. Building on my 2018 dissertation about gamer identity and Gamergate, I am now examining the distribution of labour, income, consumption, accumulation, and access to power that moved through Gamergate to better understand the true implications of this historic period in games culture and its connection to the broader global crisis of inequality and rising fascism. This paper, with a much smaller scope than a manuscript, focuses mostly on identifying key actors (the “who”) rather than the “what” and “how.” For example, those who built their careers, platforms, channels, and reputation on Gamergate. This was facilitated through an infrastructure of websites, social media platforms, streaming services, imageboards, and media companies associated with conservative movements. These platforms are what Adrienne L. Massanari has referred to as the “alternative web” and “alt-tech” platforms i.e. platforms created and explicitly designed to both create and court a far-right audience as opposed to ones that are created for all users, and include alt-right users (i.e. YouTube, Reddit, Discord, Twitch).

Gamergate therefore became the perfect example of how to utilize a culture war that pits the powerless against the even more powerless, to distract them from the revolutionary potential of the larger class war of the global majority against the ruling class. The political economy of Gamergate is key not only to understanding the current state of games and social media but also to understanding how the global rise of fascism became not only possible *but also profitable*.

LIMITATIONS

It is outside the scope of this short article to properly retell the Gamergate story; for examples of this general history/storytelling on Gamergate, see (Donovan et al., 2022; Massanari, 2024; O’Donnell, 2022; Quinn, 2017; Vossen, 2018).

FRAMEWORK

I have been following, researching, and writing about Gamergate since the day it “began” in 2014. Prior to that I had been closely tracking the harassment of Anita Sarkeesian and other feminists online in part because I had my first encounter with online harassment in 2012 (Vossen 2014; Vossen 2016; Vossen 2018).¹ I have long interrogated the political and economic dimensions of the movement, but I have yet to conduct a political economy of Gamergate; to my knowledge, this is the first. This work combines methods from feminist political economy (Cantillon et al., 2023) and intersectional political economy (Byerly, 2025). I build on related research such as *Gaming Democracy: How Silicon Valley Leveled up the Far Right* (Massanari, 2024), and the work of journalist Joseph Bernstein (formerly *Buzzfeed*, now *New York Times*) who, for many years, traced the shape of the larger culture war with special attention to the outsized influence that *Breitbart News* (2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2018a; 2018b) Steve Bannon, and the Mercer family were having on politics and culture (2018b; 2018c). This analysis also builds upon works of political economy in Game Studies such as Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg de Peuter’s *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (2009), and Jamie Woodcock’s *Marx at the Arcade* (2019). I was particularly inspired by Daniel Joseph, Tom Brock, and William Partin’s 2025 article “Towards a Geopolitical Economy of eSports: Making sense of Saudi Arabia’s investments,” in which Joseph et al. analyze the Savvy Gaming Group, led by gaming executive Brian Ward. The authors take an approach that “emphasises the critical role of states, corporations and other entities in the quest for power and resources, with esports emerging as a key component” (2025, 315).

Similarly, I will examine how Gamergate was a key component in the power relations of the current US government. Gamergate gave credence to the idea of investing in a digital ecosystem that fosters a population of apolitical reactionary (mostly) white (mostly) men to seize digital and governmental power. It was clear that this reactionary population would become extremely angry at any perceived disruption to their systems of pleasure via leisure activities, including video games. It became clear that if they felt these systems of pleasure were threatened, they would do anything to stop the threat. The goal then became to harness that hatred, influence it, and direct it. As Steve Bannon, co-founder of *Breitbart News* and former chief strategist for President Trump, told journalist Joshua Green, “I realized Milo could connect with these kids right away [...]. You can activate that army. They come in through Gamergate or whatever and then get turned onto politics and Trump” (Green, 2017, 147). Bannon is referring to Milo Yiannopoulos, a key figure my analysis, who will be explored below.

POWER

I argue that Gamergate was not a group one could “join” or an organized movement, nor was it simply an event or series of events. This distributed nature makes Gamergate it difficult to discuss. Jack Z. Bratich has identified Gamergate as a powerful manifestation of what Félix Guattari termed “microfascism,” the everyday actions of individuals that create the conditions for state-level macrofascism to take root. In this paper I argue that Gamergate had and has substantial use value as a breeding ground for microfascism for those seeking power for political or economic reasons. In this way, Gamergate is a profound example of what Joseph Nye called “soft power”:

Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment (2017, 2).

Nye also later coined the term “cyber power,” which he asserts can be used to produce preferred outcomes both “within and outside cyberspace” (2010, 3). He explains,

Cyber power behavior rests upon a set of resources that relate to the creation, control and communication of electronic and computer based information -- infrastructure, networks, software, human skills. This includes the Internet of networked computers, but also intranets, cellular technologies and space based communications. Defined behaviorally, cyber power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through use of the electronically interconnected information resources of the cyber domain (2010, 2).

Cyber power is, in its essence, exactly what the far-right, and now the US government, was developing throughout the events of Gamergate, up until the present day. This means not only obtaining soft power by cultivating a highly conservative media space via “meme wars” but also obtaining hard power through, for example, the acquisition of allied technology companies, access to rare minerals, control over physical data centers, and solidifying wealth and laundering money and evading taxes through cryptocurrency (Hayden, 2021).²

Figures like Bannon were able to use cyber power to seize on culture war grievances (the media is too woke, too liberal, everything is too politically correct, feminism ruins everything, etc.) and transform the online misogyny into a broader culture war, launching *Breitbart* staffers like Yiannopoulos to widespread fame and helping propel Donald Trump to the White House. This process was committed not through direct action, but by cultivating a network of “armies” and platforms that would influence the target population to move their political views further to the right. To harness their anger about those “disrupting” their systems of pleasure, to larger political ends. This results in both simple outcomes (i.e. advocating and then voting for Trump is seen as an act of rebellion against “oppression”) but also much more complex outcomes in line with the logic of stochastic terrorism (or stochastic violence), i.e. influential individuals using rhetoric of dehumanization or demonization to inspire “unknown actors” to take up random acts of violence against their perceived enemies or oppressors (Angove, 2024).

Examining the political economy of Gamergate involves looking at the infrastructure that allowed this culture of stochastic violence to emerge and thrive as a form of political violence. “Stochastic” is a term that means something that is randomly determined and cannot be precisely predicted. Similarly, it feels impossible to predict which individuals caught up in the far-right will treat threats of violence as a joke or a game, and which will act on those threats and commit real-world acts of violence (some of which are covered below). It is important to note that within this framework the unknown actors are not the “terrorists;” that title instead sits with those whose communications inspire the actors to commit violence, either as “lone wolves” or en masse (i.e., the January 6th storming of the Capitol).

METHOD

This research is informed by Marxist feminist theories of political economy and the intersectional political economy (IPE) of media theory specifically (Byerly, 2025). Feminist political economy (FPE) is “an approach that can offer adequate conceptual frameworks and methodological tools to analyse the articulation of multiple and intersecting inequalities and their wider implications for the world economy” (Cantillon et al., 2024, 3). Carolyn M. Byerly’s theory of intersectional political economy pulls from both critical race and feminist theory to focus more specifically on how IPE functions in the specific context of US capitalism, in part because gender, race, sexuality, intersect with power, class, and capital and social hierarchy in such specific orientations in the US context. Byerly notes that in the US, the wealthiest individuals who form the “power elite” often do so by owning and managing media outlets such as film studios, newspapers, and social media platforms, often through giant media conglomerates. She explains that the central goal of her work is to investigate communication and power in media by “locating the structures that bind gender, race, and class together” (Byerly, 2025). One key aspect of FPE is pushing back against the illusion that there is a divide between public and private domains (Cantillon et al., 2024, 7). When discussing online harassment, this is doubly important, as what happens online is often seen as neither public nor private, but instead as a “not real” third space that is not taken seriously. This perspective is incredibly relevant to the analysis of Gamergate as their conspiracies imagine control and power in the hands of individual feminist journalists, academics, game developers, or critics, rather than in the hands of those who own and operate the means of producing and publishing games and media. In other words, they are attributing incredible power to actors with little to no actual capital or power who

may have specific subcultural capital that operates only in particular spaces (i.e., even the most famous games journalist or games academic is known only to a tiny group of people), which does not allow for class mobility.

This project adapts Henry Bernstein's (2017) four key questions of political economy as its loose structure; these questions are:

- Who owns what?
- Who does what?
- Who gets what?
- What do they do with it?

I will attempt to answer many of these questions directly, by giving background information on the "who" that is evoked by Bernstein's questions. When looking at Gamergate through the lens of FPE/IPE, a few distinct categories of actors must be considered. The first are those who were leaders but diffuse and not always directly connected to the far-right "leadership." I refer to this group as "Gamergate Influencers." What follows is a list of prominent figures in the Gamergate movement with short descriptions of their significance. I will attempt to answer who they are, what they own, what they do, what they get, and what they do with it. Due to the scope of this paper, I cannot include every influencer, as there are many, or as much detail as I would like, but I plan to synthesize that information in future research.

INFLUENCERS

While some managed to turn their outrage career into a source of long-term economic capital, many did not sustain the power they gained during Gamergate. These influencers dehumanize their enemies, often by lying about their actions, sometimes by simply criticizing their appearance or even desirability. It is important to the far-right movement that these influencers come from a variety of political viewpoints, so that they can shepherd the radicalized along the spectrum of conservatism, often while insisting that they do not personally identify as conservative, therefore expanding the Overton window of what it is acceptable to do or say as a "moderate," "liberal," etc. These influencers are especially valuable to the larger far-right movement when they are NOT white, male, or straight, as it creates an illusion of diversity in their movement and sows confusion among the less online public (i.e. "he cannot be far-right, he's gay!", "she can't be far-right, she is black!" etc.).

Milo Yiannopoulos AKA Milo

Yiannopoulos was an improbable leader for Gamergate because he had publicly expressed his disdain for both video games and gamers, stating at different points that gamers were "pungent beta male bollock scratchers" and that "few things are more embarrassing than grown men getting over excited about video games" (Milburn 2018, 169). In fact, after Elliot Rodger's killing spree in the spring of 2014, Yiannopoulos authored an article *blaming video games for the murder*, as a way of protecting the anti-feminist far-right. He explained that it was not "sexism" that caused the crime which was the position of "opportunistic posturing from feminists" it was instead "the blurring of fantasy and reality in today's video game-obsessed young men" concluding that it was "nihilistic video games, not the myth of patriarchal oppression" that led Rodger, an "incel" to shoot and kill 6 young men and women and injure many more (Donovan et al., 2022, 82).

Yiannopoulos then did a 180 on gamers in the Fall of 2014, when realizing that his key audience, anti-feminists, who also hated “social justice lunatics” were frequently also gamers (Donovan et al., 2022, 83). He wrote his first article about Gamergate in September 2014, “Feminist Bullies Tearing the Video Game Industry Apart.” While Milo was not necessarily the most knowledgeable or prolific Gamergate influencer, he was the loudest. Or he at least had the largest platform, thanks to his job at *Breitbart News*. He had been working as a journalist since 2009 and as a tech journalist since 2011 but it was only through Gamergate that he gained substantial capital, cultural, and otherwise, leading to him securing speaking engagements at many conservative events, such as the “Gays for Trump” event at the 2016 Republican National Convention.

Milo’s new career involves running his own talent management and public relations company “Tarantula” for “problematic” celebrities such as Kanye West (Dolak, 2024). He claims to have two wealthy financial backers for his company, including one tied to the Trump administration (Dolak, 2024). There is simply no way that Yiannopoulos would have reached this level of financial success or fame without Gamergate. Yiannopoulos appears to also be running a company, “Milo Inc.,” which a press release describes as “a fully tooled-up talent factory and management company dedicated to the destruction of political correctness and the progressive left” (Bond, 2017).

Sargon of Akkad AKA Carl Benjamin

Benjamin was the most prolific YouTuber associated with Gamergate, with an all-time views count of 30,391,676 as of May 2026 according to YouTube’s statistics. Benjamin was particularly convinced that the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) was at the heart of the feminist gaming conspiracy. He once claimed that “DiGRA is the poisoned spring from whence all of this evil flows” because it had been “co-opted by feminists to become a think tank by which gender ideologues can disseminate their ideology to the gaming press and ultimately to gamers” (Straumsheim, 2014). Benjamin has since deleted all his Gamergate focused videos and moved on to political analysis at large although he does still frequently make videos criticizing “woke” media. He ran for a European Parliament seat as a member of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) but did not win. Benjamin has made substantial money from Gamergate over the past decade and pivoted it into a full-fledged career as a political commentator. As Sarkeesian has explained:

Carl is a man who literally profits from harassing me and other women: he makes over \$5,000 a month on Patreon for creating YouTube videos that mock, insult and discredit myself and other women online, and he’s not alone. He is one of several YouTubers who profit from the cottage industry of online harassment and antifeminism; together, these people have millions of followers who are regularly encouraged by the videos and tweets of these individuals to harass me and other women who make videos daring to assert the basic humanity of women, people of color, trans folks, and members of other marginalized groups. (2017).

By the time Patreon banned Benjamin in December 2018, he was pocketing US \$12,000 every month JUST from Patreon, i.e., not counting the money he was making from the YouTube videos themselves (Bowles, 2018). Benjamin was banned for using racial and homophobic slurs in his videos on YouTube. After being banned, he tried to claim that the n-word is not offensive in Britain, that it is only offensive in the US

(Feder, 2018). He was also eventually suspended from the YouTube partner program for making jokes about raping a British member of parliament in a video, after tweeting at the same member that he would “not even” rape her. Benjamin told BuzzFeed that the program was his “primary source of income, and how I support my family and team,” and stated that the issue was not with his content but with the fact that he was running for office (Di Stefano, 2019). Regardless, Benjamin has clearly made substantial capital off Gamergate, only limited by his own actions, which have repeatedly resulted in him being deplatformed.

Internet Aristocrat AKA James Augustine AKA Mister Metokur

The Internet Aristocrat (IA) was one of the first YouTubers to make videos about Gamergate and an early member of the Gamergate IRC and other GG forums that helped build the conspiracy. He assembled early “explainer” videos about Gamergate, which went viral and were shared by those sympathetic to the cause, such as d-list actor Adam Baldwin, an old friend of Andrew Brietbart, who came up with the name #Gamergate after watching one of the IA’s videos (Donovan et al., 2022, 96). IA frequently used gendered and racial slurs in his videos and was the co-creator of *School Shooter: North American Tour 2012*, a *Half-Life 2* mod that simulated a school shooting. Later, he went on to make content “taking down” other streamers, including some Gamergaters and other Youtubers (Donovan et al., 2022, 97). He has since moved to covering broader politics, first through YouTube videos, and then through live streams. He appears to make his living from this content, but it is unclear.

“Baked Alaska,” AKA Anthime Gionet

Gionet was a prominent Gamergate influencer and YouTuber known for flip flipping politically based on what is profitable content. He worked for BuzzFeed for many years, before taking a job working for Milo Yiannopolos. Similar to other Gamergate influencers, he eventually ended up supporting Trump’s presidency, even getting a tattoo of Trump’s face on his arm. He was a speaker at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville and went on to live-stream his part in the January 6th riots. He was sentenced to jail time but pardoned by Trump. Since his pardon he has rebranded as a Christian streamer covering news and gaming.

Ron Watkins AKA CodeMonkeyZ

Watkins was the site administrator for 8chan/8kun from 2016 to 2020. He was integral in taking Gamergate's strategies and spreading them to a larger audience through the QAnon conspiracy via 8chan, which is owned by his father, Jim Watkins. He is widely accepted by many as “Q.” Many read his participation in and interviews for the documentary *Q: Into the Storm* (Hoback, 2021) as an inadvertent admission of guilt, despite his insistence that he is not and has never been Q. In 2022 Watkins ran for Congress in Arizona, coming in last in the Republican primary (Perrett, 2022).

Ethan Ralph

Ralph was the founder and editor-in-chief of the conservative news website *The Ralph Retort*. He has publicly admitted that Gamergate was key to his radicalization, saying, “before Gamergate, I was a pretty standard liberal or even a socialist [...] I would write hit pieces on right-wing figures. It was a hobby. However, when Gamergate broke out, and I got an audience that was more reactionary, I thought, ‘It is my job to do

propaganda for Gamergate.’ The ethics in video game journalism stuff, I did not care about that” (Bernstein, 2018a). YouTube deleted Ralph’s channel in 2018, and he now streams on the platform Rumble where he discusses current events. He gets 2-4K views per stream and solicits donations via Cash App. It is unclear if this is his only form of employment.

Mike Cernovich

Cernovich is a non-practicing lawyer who made his name by “representing” Gamergate. He then became an alt-right figure blogging and making YouTube videos in the “men’s rights” space (Ridgeway, 2016, 213). Cernovich went on to become one of the key advocates of the “Pizzagate” theory and supported Trump’s presidency (Ridgeway, 2016, 213). He now makes documentary films on conservative topics.

ACTORS

I do not want to call those who committed violence “loan wolves” or “loan actors,” as this description is highly misleading as their actions were inspired by claims others had made, and highly socially motivated. These actors gained notoriety, and in some groups even cultural capital or fame for their actions, but only after their violent acts took place. Many of them publicly shared their acts through social media. I think of this group as those who are influenced to act as opposed to “loan actors.” These actors hear what the influencers and actors are saying, and they act on their directives. They do not claim or gain any economic or political power themselves, but their actions highlight the power the influencers have and create a culture of fear for targets.

David DePape – Currently serving life in prison

David DePape is a Canadian man who is the archetypal example of someone who was “activated” by Gamergate, to use Steve Bannon’s word. In 2022, DePape broke into Nancy Pelosi’s home intending to torture her into confessing that she helped steal the 2020 election from Donald Trump. Pelosi was not at home. Instead, DePape hit her husband, 82-year-old Paul, in the head with a hammer. DePape testified that 10 years earlier, he had been a card-carrying member of the Green Party living in California. While innocently searching YouTube for content about video games, he was repeatedly prompted to watch videos about Anita Sarkeesian. He was then pulled into the far-right pipeline. During his trial, DePape explained “these people would talk about how toxic Anita Sarkeesian is, over and over and over [and] I wanted to find out what was going on here. I wanted to get both sides of the story” (Rodriguez, 2023). DePape’s attorney argued that he had always been a law-abiding person until “his activation.” (The Associated Press, 2024).

Seattle4Truth AKA Lane Davis – Currently serving life in prison

Davis is a writer and YouTuber who is currently in prison for murdering his father for criticizing his political beliefs. His most popular YouTube video is a three-hour “documentary” about Gamergate, which argued that Bill Gates was behind the conspiracy (Neiwert, 2017). Davis worked as the politics editor of the *Ralph Retort* and as a “Gamergate researcher” for *Breitbart News*, working directly under Yiannopoulos. When he emailed Yiannopoulos asking for a job, he wrote, “The culture war has been my life for the past year and a half. Destroying social-justice ideology

and exposing their lies has given me a reason to live. At this point, it defines me. It's everything I live for and care about, other than having a roof over my head." (Bernstein, 2018a).

Still Unknown Actors (SUA)

These are actors who were influenced to threaten acts of violence, that they either intended to commit but did not, or never intended to commit. They are not "previously unknown," as they remain unknown to the public, although FBI files indicate they may be known to the FBI.

SUA 1 - On March 19th, 2013, an anonymous person sent an email to 25 organizers of The Game Awards that said,

A bomb will be detonated at the Game Developers' Choice award ceremony tonight unless Anita Sarkeesian's Ambassador Award is revoked. We estimate the bomb will kill at least a dozen people and injure dozens more. It would be in your best interest to accept our simple request. This is not a joke. You have been warned.

The San Francisco police investigated the building and found no credible threats on site. They later confirmed to journalists that they had passed the information to the FBI. Sarkeesian accepted the award at the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco despite the threats (Edwards, 2017).

SUA 2 - On October 14, 2014, a series of threats was emailed to employees of Utah State University when Anita Sarkeesian was supposed to speak. There were credible threats of a "Montreal Massacre-style attack" ³ and the would-be attacker claimed that they had a semi-automatic rifle, multiple pistols, and a collection of pipe bombs that they were ready to use if Sarkeesian was allowed to speak. Sarkeesian cancelled, not because of the threats, but because of Utah's gun laws, which allow people to bring weapons onto campus (Kelion, 2014). The FBI has released files investigating these threats and others, but has not prosecuted any men that they tracked down, claiming that they either seemed unlikely to do it again, did it "as a joke," or were satisfied with an apology (Edwards, 2017).

Jessica O'Donnell, author of *Gamergate and Anti-Feminism in the Digital Age*, has argued that the above threats "represent a dissonance between the industry and parts of the gaming community" where it is not about Sarkeesian so much as preventing "her contribution from being publicly recognized by the industry, as this recognition would significantly validate both her work and her influence" (2022, 89). O'Donnell concludes that, "in many ways, Sarkeesian's Ambassador Award epitomizes the influence of feminism on videogaming and its 'threat' to the medium's 'unquestioned' masculinity" (2022, 89). In other words, an award, or a speaking engagement in the industry demonstrates significant cultural capital in the industry, that these gamers do not want to see Sarkeesian gain. Threats of violence are a way to use cyberpower to attempt to interrupt this process, or to make the target too afraid to appear in public.

AMPLIFIERS

Steve Bannon

Bannon is an ex-investment banker and media executive who made much of his money off residuals from *Seinfeld*. He served as the White House Chief Strategist in Trump's first presidency. He has made several documentaries and films that support his far-right political agenda and his long-standing hatred of Bill and Hillary Clinton, and his podcast, War Room, has been a key part of the far-right media ecosystem since 2019. Bannon became executive chairman of *Breitbart News* LLC, the parent company of Breitbart News, after founder Andrew Breitbart died in 2012. Bannon also previously ran Internet Gaming Entertainment, which later became Affinity Media, a *World of Warcraft* gold-farming company (Snider, 2017). In his book *The Devil's Bargain*, journalist Joshua Green argues that Bannon was the driver behind Trump's success and that he was inspired by the gamers he had met in his career:

Bannon made another decision that wasn't immediately obvious, but that would have a significant effect on the size and nature of *Breitbart's* audience—and eventually on the 2016 presidential campaign. He wanted to attract the online legions of mostly young men he'd run up against several years earlier, believing that the Internet masses could be harnessed to stoke a political revolution (Green, 2017, 145).

Taking over *Breitbart* was Bannon's opportunity to do this, as Green explains, "He envisioned a great fusion between the masses of alienated gamers, so powerful in the online world, and the right-wing outsiders drawn to *Breitbart* by its radical politics and fuck-you attitude (2017, 146). Milo was key to this plan, Bannon explained, "When I saw Milo, it was the first time I saw a guy who could connect culturally like an Andrew Breitbart. He had fearlessness, the brains, the charisma—it's something special about those guys. They just had that 'it' factor. The difference was, Andrew had a very strong moral universe, and Milo is an amoral nihilist. I knew right away, he's gonna be a fucking meteor" (Green, 2017, 146).

Breitbart News was founded in 2007 by Andrew Breitbart (now deceased), the cofounder of *HuffPost*. The "Breitbart Doctrine" is an idea often cited by *Breitbart* staffers that "politics is downstream from culture," therefore, you cannot change politics without first changing culture. Part of this effort for *Breitbart* involved forwarding and popularizing the idea of the "cultural Marxist" academic agenda, which would later become a key element of Gamergate's arguments.

Bannon had to release his financial statements in 2017 while serving in Trump's government. He only received a \$191,000 salary from Breitbart in 2016 but was worth between "\$9.5 million and \$48 million" (Berg, 2017). Bannon's consulting firm is worth between \$5 million and \$25 million (Bannon Strategic Advisors), and his film company (Bannon Film Industries) is worth between \$1 million and \$5 million (Berg, 2017). This does not include the money Bannon received from the Government Accountability Institute, a right-wing nonprofit, or from the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica. Robert Mercer and his family also fund both organizations. In a recent interview, Bannon insisted that Trump would get a third term and "will be president in 2028" (The Economist, 2025). When the interviewer asked, "How? What about the 22nd amendment? Bannon replied that "there is a plan" to "redefine all those terms" and that "we need to finish what we started" because Trump is "an instrument of divine will" (The Economist, 2025).

Fredrick Brennan

Brennan is the creator of 8chan and was a prominent member of Gamergate. He created 8chan in two days after getting inspiration while tripping on mushrooms. He had the idea to create something like 4chan, but with people able to create their own subforums, like Reddit. He also thought 4chan was too strict and said he would not kick out groups that engaged in online harassment (Sommer, 2023, 62-63). 8chan was launched just a few months before Gamergate; therefore, when Reddit rejected Gamergate, and eventually 4chan did as well, 8chan was the natural new home (Sommer, 2023, 63). After Gamergate, there was a 4,000% increase in hourly posts on 8chan (Sommer, 2023, 63). After 2018, Brennan became an outspoken critic of the Watkins family, QAnon, and 8chan. He has since advocated for the removal of 8chan from the internet and expressing guilt over his creation. It is unclear if Brennan retained any capital from his work as the creator of 8chan; he now works as a font designer.

FUNDERS

One key question of this project, is who has the economic capital to create and fund infrastructure and platforms that allow outrage, influence, and violence to circulate? The funders are those that Byerly notes form a “power elite” by owning and managing media outlets such as film studios, newspapers, and social media platforms (Byerly, 2025). While everyone involved can circulate capital within these publics, in this paper, I will discuss just one example.

Robert and Rebekah Mercer

Robert Mercer is a Hedge Fund billionaire who has donated approximately \$35 million to Republican political campaigns in the US, and at least \$10 million (that we know of) to *Breitbart News*. His daughter, Rebekah Mercer, is said to be the one controlling the purse strings and brokering deals on behalf of her reclusive father. The two secured roles for Bannon and Kellyanne Conway in Trump’s 2016 campaign and then administration. The Mercers also bankrolled Milo Yiannopoulos’ College speaking tour in 2017 and Bannon’s film company, Glittering Steel LLC, which made conservative documentaries and campaign advertisements. While Bannon and Milo may have been the ones directing the content on *Breitbart* etc. They needed someone who was aligned with their politics to fund their operation (Delevingne, 2014).

PAWNS

The final group, who are crucial to this analysis, are those I call the Pawns; the masses of everyday people who have no power but still support the movement in other ways. This group is the most difficult to trace, as they do not have a public face or employment associated with the Gamergate or the Far-right. Although, it is safe to assume that, from a political economic perspective, these pawns are helpful because they perform labour (mass harassment, compiling information, amplification etc.) without needing to be paid or even recognized. In fact, they are likely to give money they have earned through their “real world” jobs to Far-right influencers (YouTubers, *Breitbart* journalists etc.).

CONCLUSION

The information I have included in this short article is just the tip of the iceberg, only a small sampling of the substantial research I have done thus far. I have attempted to

demonstrate the value of undertaking in depth research into the political economy of Gamergate, for both further understanding, but also to assemble these historical facts in one place for other researchers. This is especially important when the websites that hold these articles, and much of this information, could disappear at any second. While doing this work, I have come across hundreds, if not thousands of broken links, deleted webpages, YouTube videos and channels, and social media accounts.

I hope that as I continue this project, and piece together the threads of Gamergate, it helps wake up those who are still victim to the coma of neoliberalism, or the accelerationist drug of neofascism. Regardless of political affiliation many are realizing that, amongst the wealthiest and most influential men in the world, there are no political parties or divisions; there is only class solidarity. For some it was the elusive Epstein files that acted as the wake-up call, for others it was Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), or watching the never-ending news cycle of the international conflicts that the U.S. government is entering, causing, and funding. No matter what jolted people awake, many realize that these culture wars are a distraction. A way to convince individuals that their problems are not caused by the uber wealthy and their capitalist imperialist agenda, but by a feminist talking about video games. The war on “woke” is nothing but a waste of time, energy, and anger. We are all right to be angry, but that anger is being misdirected towards those without any real power. We need solidarity in times of crisis; to be united in our call for no war but class war. Gamergate reveals how culture wars can obscure underlying economic power structures by redirecting anger toward marginalized groups rather than at those creating systemic inequality. It demonstrates how digital platforms, media networks, and political actors can harness cultural conflict to build influence and consolidate power. Understanding its political economy is essential not only for analyzing games culture but for explaining the broader rise of far-right movements, the normalization of online harassment, and the profitability of political polarization.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In 2014, Zoe Quinn was a fledgling game designer. They created the lo-fi game *Depression Quest* to help those struggling with mental health issues. A short text-based game, it received limited positive attention from academics and the independent gaming community. But that was nothing compared to the negative attention Zoe got when their ex-boyfriend published a 9,000-word diatribe on WordPress (which was then shared to 4Chan and other websites), accusing Zoe of cheating on him and implying that they had exchanged sex for favourable press of *Depression Quest*. "The Zoe Post" was a call to arms for some gamers who argued that games journalism was "in bed" both literally and figuratively with feminists in games.

² Many far-right political figures have either pushed for greater acceptance of cryptocurrency or even created their own currency. For some, this is directly related to Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories around banking systems, for others, it is about wanting to hide the origin or destination of the transactions they are making online, making it more difficult for people to follow the money. Frequently, campaigns and influencers accept donations in Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. For example, potentially the most influential early cryptocurrency advocate was convicted pedophile and billionaire sex-trafficker, Jeffrey Epstein, who invested millions into Bitcoin development as early as 2014 (Willems, 2026). Epstein and Bannon were close friends and allies, with Bannon working on a documentary about Epstein, and Epstein connecting Bannon with his friends in high places, such as Noam Chomsky, Palantir founder Peter Thiel, and the leaders of various countries (Marcetic, 2025). Bannon frequently asked Epstein for advice or explanations on economics or cryptocurrency.

³ The École Polytechnique massacre, commonly referred to as "The Montreal Massacre," was a misogynistic and anti-feminist mass shooting that took place on December 6th, 1989, at École Polytechnique, an engineering school at the Université de Montréal, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The shooter targeted women students explicitly, first asking fifty men to leave the room before shooting all nine women in the mechanical engineering classroom. When the women asked the shooter who he was, he told them he was someone "fighting feminism" before moving on to the rest of the campus, in total he shot 27 people and killed 14 women (Bloom, 2022). Canada now implements a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women every December 6th. Terrorism and extremism expert Mia Bloom has discussed how the shooter, Marc Lepine, is the second most discussed figure on Incel forums, despite the shooting taking place long before the concept of an Incel, or the violence committed by the community, had been given a name (Bloom, 2022).