

TECH

## Andrew Yang Wants The Support Of The Pro-Trump Internet. Now It Is Threatening To Devour Him.

After Andrew Yang caught the attention of Reddit and 4chan, his campaign leaned into it. Now those same communities are leading a harassment campaign against his deputy chief of staff.

By Ryan Broderick

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*4chan*

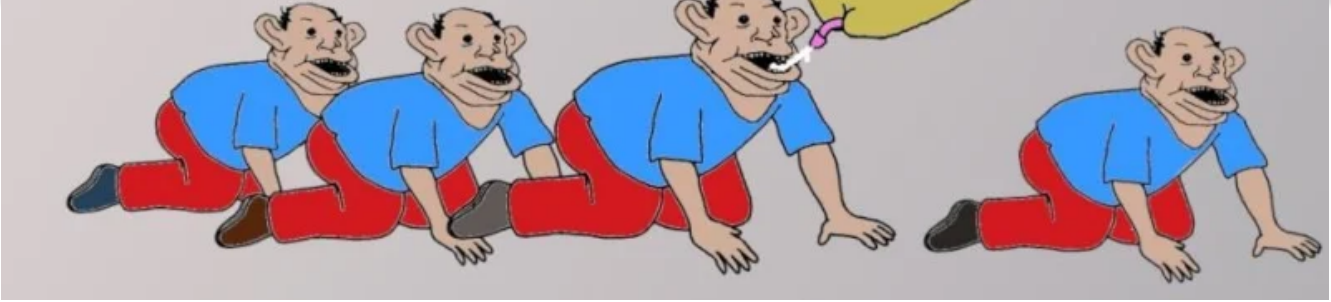
An obscure Democrat running for president has found an unexpected well of support in the same social media spaces that elevated a new far right in 2016.

But while entrepreneur Andrew Yang has enjoyed a run of surprised, favorable press since he began raising money and generating interest from gamers, internet trolls, and extremely online individuals, his campaign is now facing an early backlash in the form of leaks, doxing, and an escalating rhetorical battle over who, exactly, owns the remaining male-dominated corners of social media.

Yang, who is running for president on some big ideas about universal basic income and protecting jobs from automation and AI, found his fame — and his “Yang Gang” — in part thanks to a February appearance on the *Joe Rogan Experience*. His new supporters are attracted to his technology-first political platform. And because they hail largely from the chanterculture meme swamps of Instagram, Reddit, Twitter, and 4chan, they have plastered social media with pro-Yang content, helping him raise the crucial small contributions needed to qualify for a debate.

But the meme swamps the Yang Gang calls home harbor all sorts of life — some of it far less affable. And the Yang campaign is learning that lesson the hard way. Over the past few days, its deputy chief of staff has become the target of a textbook 4chan harassment campaign. She's been doxed, harassed, and cast as the lead character in an outlandish conspiracy theory about a “Jewish plot” to manipulate 4chan users into sharing pro-Yang content.





4chan

That this is happening as Yang has been out celebrating his new status as a dank meme, shows just how quickly the chanterculture bear can turn on those who believe they can ride it to victory.

“I don't think there's any danger of the memes counterbalancing the primary message of the campaign,” Yang told BuzzFeed News in an interview earlier this week. “Because the primary message of the campaign is reaching thousands of people all the time. And again, people are smart. They can tell the difference between reality and a bunch of images that clearly put together to get a laugh.”

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In many ways, the tough lesson the Yang campaign is currently learning is a perfect example of a key and daunting challenge presidential candidates will face in 2020: How do you rally the white, technologically literate, working-class men that supported the Trump campaign without getting mired in the sump of toxicity and radicalization all around them?

Yang's campaign, for example, has also attracted admirers from the far-right. White supremacist website the Daily Stormer has written about him. White nationalist leader Richard Spencer has enthusiastically tweeted about him. YouTuber James Allsup, another white nationalist, said Yang is the future. 4chan users declared him a

avior of the white race for defending American workers.

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Yang's embrace of 4chan started going south earlier this month, after Yang's deputy Chief of Staff Carly Reilly tweeted, "UBI (universal basic income) is feminist." The remark irked some on 4chan's Politically Incorrect (/pol/) board, home to some of the community's more hardcore white nationalists. They lashed out, infiltrated a pro-Yang Discord server, and started leaking screenshots, hoping to destabilize the Yang Gang.

When a pro-Yang Discord member posted a link to Reilly's Calendly calendar and asked supporters to email her, some 4chan trolls snagged it and doxed her, posting her personal information and circulated a rumor that her former employer, RadicalMedia, was secretly being paid by the campaign to infiltrate 4chan to spread pro-Yang content.

"I believe that Yang 2020 is working with RadicalMedia LLC, a marketing and publicity firm, to shill Yang on 4chan and other websites, to get him into the debate," one anonymous user wrote.

Others noted that RadicalMedia has a Shanghai office, folding that detail into another emerging conspiracy theory that Yang is a socialist Chinese spy.

A spokesperson for RadicalMedia told BuzzFeed News that it has no affiliation with the Yang campaign.



While Reilly's Twitter mentions have been mostly untouched by trolls, abuse on 4chan is widespread. She's featured in over a dozen huge threads. She's been photoshopped into an "approved by Carly" Yang 2020 sticker that's covered in swastikas. One user posted a bunch of her childhood photos and wrote, "I propose we handle this in proper /pol/ fashion; we print out a photo of a young Carly Reilly, jizz all over it, and post it to /pol/ with a timestamp."

In another thread, a user posted links to Reilly's Facebook and the Facebook accounts of people who appear to be her mother and father. Another user replied, "I'm working on her home address, social security number, and credit cards. Let's see how well Reilly can shill with destroyed credit."

A spokesperson for the Yang campaign told BuzzFeed News that they campaign is taking the harassment campaign against Reilly seriously.

**"They see me as someone who understands them certainly better than most mainstream politicians. I just think there's some kind of affinity because I was a gamer once too."**

"As a campaign that believes in the 'Humanity First' message, we take any and all threats or harassment toward our team members and staff very seriously," the spokesperson told BuzzFeed News. "This is why we have implemented new security measures for our staff. We are also building extensive training for our online moderators to ensure that they can not only identify any online harassment, but can handle it appropriately. In this hyper-digital era, it is likely that these types of attacks from fringe groups online will continue, targeting good-hearted people. As for our campaign, we will not stand for it, and we will not allow these types of attacks to limit our ability to spread our 'Humanity First' message."

That Yang's team is now rushing to implement security measures inspired by the behavior of the same internet communities it has so eagerly embraced is yet another signpost on the polarized political landscape candidates are heading into in 2020. Just last week, Yang was celebrating his popularity among what he described as “shy” young men “that play a lot of video games.”

“They see me as someone who understands them certainly better than most mainstream politicians,” he said. “I just think there's some kind of affinity because I was a gamer once too.”



**Dylan Matthews**  
@dylanmatt

I do not endorse any of the contents of this video but I also can't stop watching it  
<https://t.co/BX1AXCky9c>

07:54 PM - 13 Mar 2019

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Yang is the founder of Venture for America, a nonprofit that reported a revenue of \$6.9 million in 2016, that places college graduates at startups “to revitalize American cities and communities through entrepreneurship.” As a Democratic candidate, he is still very much an outsider and a long shot (although, this week, he said he met one of the thresholds for the first Democratic primary debate by raising money from 65,000 unique donors from at least 20 states). But his platform clearly resonates with portions of a very powerful base.

A number of Yang Gang members told BuzzFeed News they were former Trump supporters attracted to Yang's focus on bringing back jobs they feel are being lost to automation and AI. They also enthused over Yang's universal basic income proposal — a program he's calling the “freedom dividend,” which would give all US citizens over age 18

\$1,000 a month. His supporters have nicknamed it “Yang bucks” or

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NetBux, a play on the acronym NEET (Not in Education,

Employment, or Training), which is typically used to describe nerdy individuals who have more or less dropped out of society.

**“I am a Gamer for life. Yang is our Shield. The memes are our Sword. Also, subscribe to PewDiePie.”**

A 22-year-old Yang supporter named Drew from Central Florida told BuzzFeed News that there is definitely an overlap between Trump voters and the Yang Gang. “Trump and Yang both, almost by accident, tapped into tightly knit, organic, inertial grassroots communities that love to [post],” he said.

One 23-year-old who asked to be referred to as Corred, told BuzzFeed News that he worked for Trump’s campaign, but plans to register as a Democrat to vote for Yang in 2020. A gamer, Corred, runs a yangforpresident Instagram account and sells Yang 2020 hats on a yanggang.money online store.

“Yang talks about suicides, drug addictions, and the debilitating financial burden amongst the American working class,” he said. “I think every American in his or her 20s has known someone deeply affected by these issues. “I am a Gamer for life. Yang is our Shield. The memes are our Sword. Also, subscribe to PewDiePie,” he said.

*Twitter*

Yang, who hasn't yet acknowledged the 4chan storm he unwittingly summoned, doesn't particularly worried about becoming tethered to it. He recently did a segment with Tucker Carlson. And earlier this week, a controversial Twitch streamer named Steven Kenneth Bonnell II, who goes by "Destiny" online, announced that Yang would be going on his podcast. Bonnell was recently suspended from Twitch for using anti-gay language; he was banned from Twitter for posting racist content.

"One of the things I want to make very clear is that I keep saying yes to any substantial press requests from any press outlet," Yang told BuzzFeed News. "So if I had gotten requests from MSNBC, I would have been there the next day. If I get requests from Fox, I'm there the next day," he said.



Meanwhile, Yang’s Trump-supporter-convert fanbase continues to give him the full MAGA treatment. They’ve created their own pink version of the Make America Great Again hat, and use a variation of Trump’s MAGA acronym — MIGA, which stands for “Make Israel Great Again” and is meant to satirize Trump’s support for Israel. They’re distributing Pro-Yang copy-pasta via several Pastebin websites. They’re building directories of Yang memes. They’re organizing on Discord. And many of them are actively using 4chan’s Politically Correct board as a platform to recruit new supporters.

As one user in a Yang Discord server wrote, “4chan --> dank subreddits --> normie subreddits --> Imgur --> Facebook --> journalist pickup. That was the lifecycle of Pepe when it hit hard in mid-2016. The meme flowchart if you will.”

#### TOPICS IN THIS ARTICLE

Democrats



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