

# Real-world politics invade video games ahead of US election

November 1 2020, by Glenn Chapman

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Video games such as Animal Crossing are being used to get political messages across in the polarized 2020 US election

Fans of US President Donald Trump can insert his character in some video games, even protect him from assassination in notoriously lawless

Grand Theft Auto.

Gamers with a different political tilt can visit Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden at his headquarters in Animal Crossing, and display his campaign posters in virtual yards there.

Real-life politics have invaded [video](#) games, echoing divisive themes raging in the streets and leaving some players lamenting that their cherished fantasy worlds are being violated.

As games increasingly move online, tech-savvy gamers are using software tools to plug in political themes, effectively delivering campaign messages to fellow players and those watching.

"We will see more and more use of video games to engage in the political world," said International Game Developers Association executive director Renee Gittins.

"TV ads are just not a thing people see any more; you have to go where the audience is, and to a large extent that audience is in video games."

Video games let politicians reach an increasingly diverse demographic including young audiences. A recent Statista survey found that 38 percent of US [video game](#) players range in age from 18 to 34 years old.

## Politics Among Us

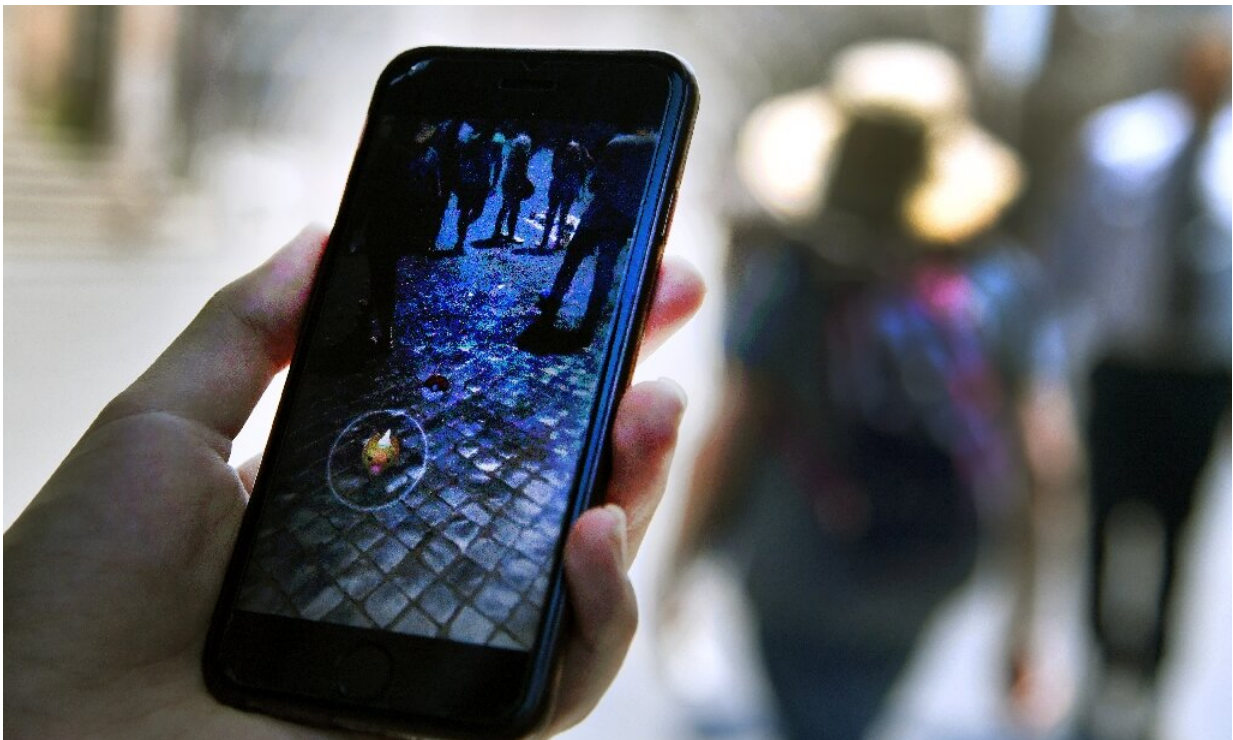
US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became a star on Twitch recently, playing "Among Us" for an audience that topped 430,000 viewers in an effort to encourage voting, becoming one of the most widely viewed events on the platform.

The [social media](#) savvy Democratic lawmaker from New York made her

game-streaming debut at the Amazon-owned platform in a match with an array of Twitch stars.

Ocasio-Cortez, known to be a gamer, lightly sprinkled politics while playing the popular game of "teamwork and betrayal" for more than three hours.

Ocasio-Cortez and fellow gamers were joined at one point by Democratic Congress member Ilhan Omar of Minnesota.



Some gamers are complaining about politics invading the world of video games that has been a way for people to escape reality

"My two boys watching @AOC & @IlhanMN on Twitch playing Among

Us," Representative Rashida Tlaib said in a tweet that included a picture of the children focused on a tablet screen.

"They think this is the coolest thing ever and are trying to convince me to get with the program."

Days later, Among Us was hacked by attackers spreading pro-Trump spam.

## **BLM Brouhaha**

Outrage erupted on Twitter recently after Sony offered a PlayStation home page with a Black Lives Matter theme free for the consoles.

Twitter user Yuri Kazuto Cinque, of account @yuricinque, was among a slew of gamers who expressed offense and vowed not to buy the PlayStation 5 console launching next month.

"Video games are meant for games, not political or social movements," Cinque said in a tweeted comment.

Justin Raposo of Twitter account @ogninjasmoke echoed the protest.

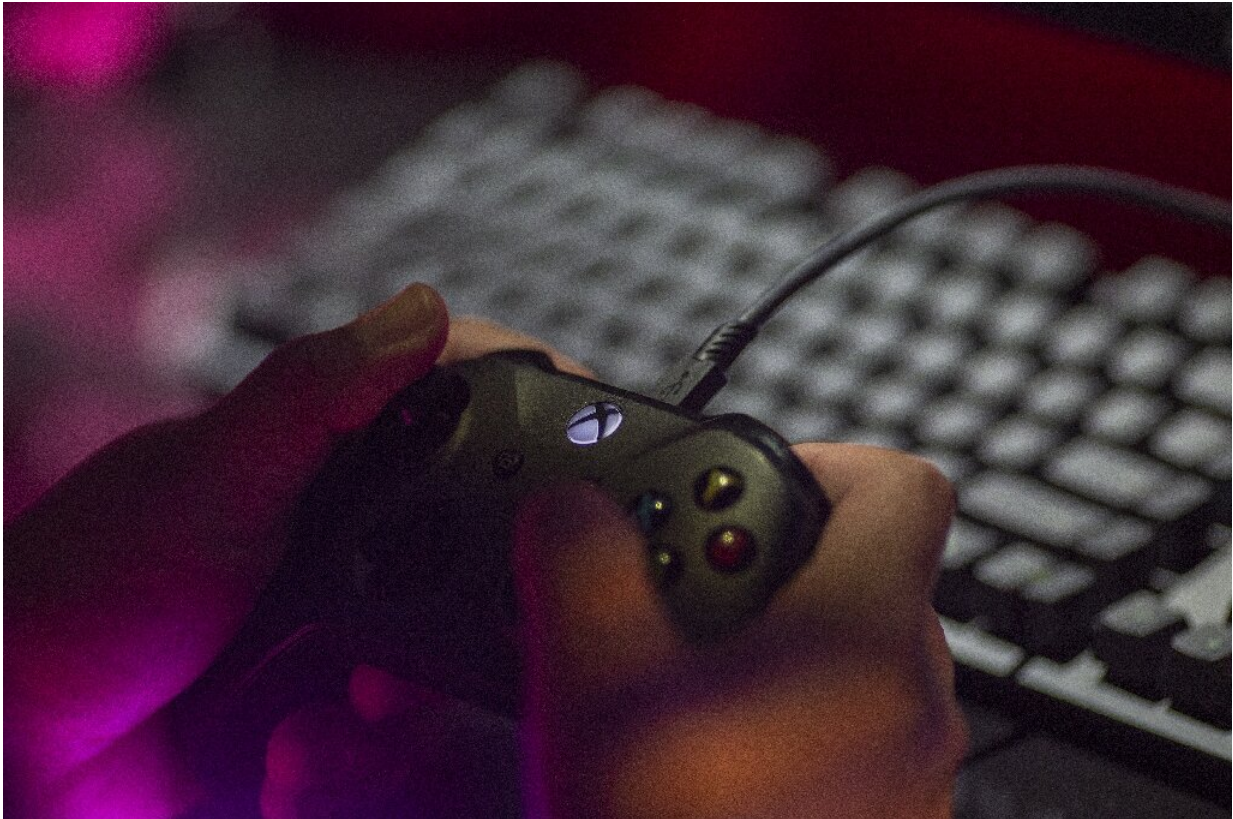
"Can I escape from reality anymore?" Raposo asked rhetorically. "First sports now video games!"

Others were quick to point out that each of the major console makers has expressed support for the BLM movement and that political themes have routinely been video game plot lines.

Online video game shop Steam has a section devoted to politics where offerings include Electioneering, which challenges players to do whatever is necessary to become US president.



The game promises to put "you at the nexus of the events of 2020; you will hire agents, run political ads, research topics, use hacking, and more in this turn-based political strategy game."



Tech-savvy gamers can upload modifications to online games that add new elements, including political themes

## **Mod mayhem**

Video games are an art form, and creators express opinions of all types including political, Gittins noted.

Gamers with software skills weigh in with opinions of their own by

building mini-programs called "mods" that can be added to big-name titles.

Mods are relatively easy to develop, which could be the reason for a flood of political content.

Popular platform Nexus Mods has banned politically themed content for now due to "a spate of provocative and troll mods being uploaded based around current sociopolitical issues in the United States."

Nexus told users it decided to "wipe our hands clean of this mess" with a ban considering the low quality of mods and polarizing views expressed.

"Most of these mods are being uploaded by cowards with sock-puppet accounts deliberately to try and cause a stir," Nexus told user when announcing the ban.

Video [game](#) play has boomed during the pandemic, as people stuck at home turn to them for entertainment.

As the community of gamers grows, it brings with it social and political debates that play out in the real world, Gittins noted.

"There is a subset of people who are opposed to politics being in their video games but are happy to label anything they disagree with as political," Gittins said.

"The issue is kind of tribalism when it comes down to it."

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