

Intelligence documents leak on Discord raises questions about security concerns and online gaming communities

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Credit: Pexels

Discord, a chat platform originally built for online gaming, is now subject of intense scrutiny after intelligence documents were

leaked—allegedly by a member of the military.

James Ivory, a Virginia Tech professor who researches [social media](#) and video game use related to military simulations and links to political extremism and intelligence risks, said Discord has become a very mainstream platform for individual and community messaging.

"The fact that Discord is primarily used for [privacy groups](#) and community conversations rather than public posts introduces [security concerns](#) because the privacy of its groups may give the false illusion that material shared in closed forums will stay in those closed forums," Ivory said.

Ivory said this underscores a virtually impossible task of monitoring the online activities through spaces like this. "As we have seen in this case, what starts private may not stay private, but it may certainly be easy for people in closed online groups on Discord to have the false belief that what they share, will stay there."

For the [intelligence community](#), [online gaming](#) platforms have been identified as a security concern for more than a decade, so U.S. intelligence as well as other entities have long been active in these communities. "That intelligence activity, by actors with both good and bad intent regarding global safety and security, will no doubt continue and intensify in the private groups of Discord as well as other online communities," Ivory said.

When asked about gaming communities becoming a place for young, disaffected military members to gather, Ivory agreed that there is certainly evidence that gaming communities focused around military simulation games are often also environments where political extremism flourishes.

"There are a lot of online gaming communities with a heavy focus on [military technology](#) and procedures, and privileged information will gain a lot of attention and credibility in such communities," Ivory explained. "As long as we have young people working in defense with access to classified intelligence information who are involved in these small online communities and private discussion groups, the temptation will be there to share information to gain clout—even though the consequences for both them and the people affected by the leaks are extremely serious."

New details surrounding the leak are still coming out, but Ivory's research in this field indicates there are a lot of young men—civilians and active duty—interested in military culture who are very active in gaming and in [online communities](#) where extreme views are shared.

"This leak is much broader in scope, but we certainly have a precedent of online groups related to military simulation being places where [extreme views](#) and sensitive documents are shared—and they spread from there," said Ivory.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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