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Trump Fans and the Dangers of Alt-Right “Stan Twitter”

Within the last 10 years, fan culture on the internet has grown into a worldwide phenomenon, solidifying its position as a popular internet subculture. Fan culture has gained major traction on virtually every social media platform, but the platform that’s become the epicenter of online fan culture is Twitter. The section of Twitter dedicated to fandom discourse is commonly referred to as [“stan Twitter.”](#) The phrase “stan,” [which comes from a lyric from the 2000 Eminem and Dido song of the same name that refers to obsessive fans](#), has become the new moniker for die-hard fans of any celebrity. Twitter has seen an influx of these “stans,” now becoming the new hub for internet fan culture.

Although the term “stans” is most commonly used to describe fans of musicians, actors, or other internet personalities, I want to introduce a specific subculture on Twitter that I believe to be the epitome of [“stan culture”](#): political Twitter. Twitter users associated with political movements, and political figures perfectly embody stan culture through the behaviors they exhibit on Twitter. The most notable example of this crossover between stan culture and politics can be found in the fanbase of former President Donald Trump. Trump fans often engage in activities that are extremely commonplace in stan culture: they’ve [created merchandise and social media tributes](#), and they often [engage in Twitter arguments with supporters of other ideologies or politicians](#).

Although Trump fans take part in the average activities of a “stan,” their political identity sets them apart from other fandoms. The core values of Trump fans are [rooted in white supremacy](#), homophobia, and other forms of bigotry, and their behavior on Twitter reflects these values.

Over the past few years, Trump fans have become infamous for their incessant harassment and trolling on Twitter, with many of the targeted users being [women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people](#). They’ve been taking advantage of Twitter’s [lax approach to moderation and promotion of free speech](#) to post [hateful messages and threats with little to no repercussions](#). Some users have even gone as far as to engage in doxing, in which they reveal others’ personal or private information, [such as their phone number, home address, or social security number](#).

One of the most recent and notable examples of this behavior comes from the Twitter account Libs of TikTok (@LibsofTikTok), who frequently posts [fake information](#) regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ education in American schools and [reveals personal information about LGBTQ+ teachers](#), often leading to those individuals being harassed both online and offline by a barrage of Libs of TikTok’s fans. But the Libs of TikTok situation isn’t the first time that far-right Twitter users have taken part in incessant harassment. Back in 2017, feminist writer Lindy West was facing harassment from members of the alt-right movement and was eventually [driven off of Twitter due to Twitter’s lack of any substantive action to stop it](#). In her [essay published by the Guardian](#) explaining why she decided to deactivate her Twitter account, she asked these two questions that we’re still asking even now, five years later: [“How much hate speech will bystanders ignore? When will Twitter intervene and start protecting its users?”](#)

A few months ago, Twitter decided to try and answer these questions, taking a bigger step in their attempt to prevent doxing on their platform. In December 2021, Twitter announced a policy that allowed users to report other users whose tweets included [“private media that is not available elsewhere online as a tool to harass, intimidate, and reveal the identities of individuals.”](#) and if the complaints [“had merit”](#) and the media [“wasn’t used for a journalistic or public interest purpose.”](#) those accounts would then be deactivated. Although this policy may seem like a step in the right direction, there was one major underlying issue: it’s incredibly vague. Who determines whether or not a complaint “has merit?” What constitutes whether or not media is being used in the interest of the public?

Although Twitter was designed to be a free and open space for users to interact with each other, this concept often leaves users vulnerable to harassment. Twitter itself has to take some sort of responsibility when it comes to the abuse and harassment that its users inflict on others, as it often has real-world consequences, especially when it occurs within the political community of Twitter. Even though the harassment is being carried out by individual users, Twitter needs to acknowledge that it’s the platform that continues to enable it.