

Right-Wing YouTuber Behind Viral Minnesota Fraud Video Has Long Anti-Immigrant History

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Conservative influencer Nick Shirley films protesters demonstrating against ICE arrests on Oct. 22, 2025, in New York City. Photo: Adam Gray/Getty Images)

The day after Christmas, far-right YouTuber Nick Shirley posted a video claiming to have exposed fraud at Somali-owned day care centers in Minnesota. Portions of the 42-minute video — mostly scenes where Shirley is turned away at the day cares — went viral in conservative circles, catching the attention of the Trump administration, which was already at work [targeting](#) Minnesota’s Somali community amid its broader war on immigrants.

The [video](#), which has been viewed more than 2.2 million times on YouTube and millions more on other platforms, sparked a renewed crackdown in Minneapolis, with the Department of Homeland Security announcing on Monday it would visit 30 sites suspected of fraud across the city. A DHS official told [CBS News Minnesota](#) its agents would focus on a “little of everything,” when asked whether immigration enforcement would be a part of the crackdown. Threatening arrests, the agency posted a [video](#) to X in which agents enter a smoke shop and question an employee about a nearby day care center.

This isn’t the first time the conservative YouTuber has gotten the attention of the Trump administration. Shirley participated in President Donald Trump’s “[Roundtable on Antifa](#)” in October after an altercation at an anti-ICE protest. At age 23, his videos aren’t merely influencing his audiences — they’re also influencing government action.

This worries immigrant rights advocates, who fear that the fallout from Shirley’s video will only worsen the harm already being done to Minnesota’s immigrant communities at a time when Trump has taken to calling Somali people “[garbage](#)” at his rallies.

“The very real-world consequence is that it’s going to exacerbate the situation that we have in Minnesota right now where we have a lot of people, including U.S. citizens or people with lawful status being arrested and detained by ICE,” said Ana Pottratz Acosta, who leads the Immigration and Human Rights Clinic at the University of Minnesota Law School.

The video, she said, reinforces xenophobic tropes about the Somali community, specifically tying the community to fraud. Pottratz Acosta said she was worried the increase in DHS visits to day cares could be a pretext to simultaneously conduct immigration detentions.

“They’re doing these visits at day care sites under the auspices of conducting a fraud investigation, but if they happen to see anyone who fits a profile, they might be arrested,” Pottratz Acosta said.



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Shirley’s video builds off of the growing interest in a nonprofit fraud scandal in Minnesota involving a pandemic-era program focused on child hunger, which has resulted in dozens of guilty pleas. The Trump administration claims Minnesota’s fraud issue is much larger, to the sum of \$9 billion worth of government funds being fraudulently funneled from social services. Republicans have painted Gov. Tim Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison, both Democrats up for reelection, as responsible for an alleged lack of oversight. Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., who is Somali American and Muslim, has also been the target of right-wing and xenophobic attacks. Among other [racist stereotypes and false claims](#), Trump said, “We gotta get her the hell out” of the country at a Pennsylvania rally earlier this month.

State regulators said Monday that inspectors had visited the day cares mentioned in the video in the past six months, according to the [Minnesota Star Tribune](#), that there was no evidence of fraud at the sites during those unannounced visits, and some of the centers have already been closed or suspended. According to [Minnesota Public Radio](#), state Republican lawmakers had steered Shirley toward the day care centers he visited in the video.

Shirley defended his video and said people have been silent about “Somalians committing this fraud” because “people are scared to be called Islamophobic, racist.”

“Fraud is fraud — it doesn’t matter if it’s a Black person, white person, Asian person, Mexican,” Shirley told Fox News. “And we work too hard simply just to be paying taxes and enabling fraud to be happening.”

Despite Shirley’s insistence that race and religion have nothing to do with his investigation, the YouTuber has a long track record of using his man-on-the-street videos to target immigrants in the U.S., platforming individuals who spread [xenophobic](#) and [Islamophobic](#) beliefs [and conspiracy](#) theories. While Shirley’s videos include interviews with those protesting against such hate, he often presents immigration and Islam as a [growing threat](#) taking [over the country](#). Combined with sensationalized headlines — “Exposing Dangerous Illegal Migrant Scammers” or “The UK’s Insane Migrant Invasion” — the end result is often a portrait of immigrants as lawbreakers, a societal threat, and a strain on government resources.

Shirley did not respond to The Intercept’s request for comment.



Nick Shirley speaks during a roundtable meeting with President Donald Trump on “antifa” in the State Dining Room at the White House, on Oct. 8, 2025, in Washington. Photo: Evan Vucci/AP

In 2019, Shirley began to post prank videos with friends on YouTube while attending a public high school in [Farmington, Utah](#), a suburb of Salt Lake City. At first, his focus wasn’t especially political. He garnered a large number of his 1 million subscribers after sneaking into influencer Jake Paul’s wedding in Las Vegas.

But amid his comedic stunts, he documented the [January 6](#) insurrection at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., in 2021, where he interviewed far-right commentator and InfoWars founder Alex Jones and infamous rioter [Richard Barnett](#). Shirley said he did not take part in the violence and filmed himself leaving without entering the building. Later that year, Shirley took a two-year hiatus from YouTube to go on a mission in Santiago, Chile, as part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In late 2023, after his return to the United States, Shirley shifted from prank videos to focus on political topics, such as immigration and crime. In May 2024, he orchestrated [a stunt](#) in which he paid day laborers \$20 to jump into the back of a U-Haul van, drove them to the White House, and gave them signs demanding a meeting with Biden.

Shirley’s mother, Brooke — herself a right-wing influencer who goes by Brooker Tee Jones on TikTok, where she has more than 250,000 followers — occasionally joins her son in the videos. It was Brooke who pushed her son to start covering immigration at the southern

border after his mission trip, according to an [interview](#) with Columbia Journalism Review. Early on, she'd feed him questions to ask and lines to say in the videos, she recalled. Her content has similarly focused on immigration in recent years, including other videos that accuse Somali residents in Minnesota of health care fraud without providing evidence.

Reached by The Intercept, Brooke did not answer questions about her work or the work of her son.

Shirley has made a habit of visiting cities and countries that are settings for right-wing, anti-immigrant conspiracies, such as Aurora, Colorado, amid the [manufactured crisis](#) around the Tren de Aragua gang.

During a visit to El Salvador in 2024, Shirley filmed a series of videos sympathetic to President Nayib Bukele's violent anti-crime crackdown [on his citizens](#), including a video from the notorious [CECOT](#) prison. It's his most-viewed video to date, with 6.6 million views. In another video from El Salvador, Shirley recorded from the [Centro Industrial](#) prison, which has become a manufacturing hub where incarcerated men build school [desks](#) and vegetable market display [racks](#), a form of forced labor. "It's pretty amazing if you think about what Nayib Bukele has been able to do with this country — the streets are as safe as they've ever been, because all these guys are out," Shirley said while inside a CECOT cell block, gesturing to the incarcerated men. At no point in the video does he mention the stories of torture [and abuse](#) within the country's prison system.

Shirley was recently awarded a "[citizen journalist of the year](#)" prize by far-right media figure and [Project Veritas](#) founder, James O'Keefe, in large part because of his CECOT video.

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In other videos, Shirley himself has become a part of the story.

In September, Shirley and a small crew filmed a video [antagonizing street vendors](#) in New York City's Chinatown, referring to them as "Dangerous Migrant Scammers." Vendors could be seen scrambling away while Shirley strolls down Canal Street. At one point, one man tells Shirley to leave and asks why he's filming, leading to a physical [confrontation](#) with Shirley's cameraman.

Several weeks later, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents raided the street, detaining nine individuals. Shirley praised ICE for the raid that left the street "completely clean of illegal activity" and [taunted](#) an individual who was detained as a "scammer [who] got ICED."

Shirley has [accompanied](#) federal agents during immigration [raids](#) in Chicago, interviewing a detained man in the backseat of a federal vehicle. Since Trump's election, media access at raids has largely been given only to outlets or individuals sympathetic to the administration's mass deportation campaign.



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Alongside other far-right influencers such as Andy Ngo and Cam Higby, Shirley landed an invite to participate in Trump’s [“Roundtable on Antifa,”](#) a White House event where the administration advanced its [campaign](#) against [antifascist activists](#). “People may wonder, ‘What’s the threat to us as Americans?’ You’ll be labeled as a fascist, you’ll be labeled a Nazi, and they’ll wish death upon you as they wished death upon me,” Shirley said of the decentralized protest group at the event.

Leading up to the Minnesota day care video, Shirley released a video about “the rise of Islam” in the U.S. and what he called “Minnesota’s Somali Takeover.” The July video makes a spectacle of the call to prayer and individuals praying inside a mosque and singles out Omar, as well as an Islamic center that converted from a Lutheran church to illustrate his point of the apparent takeover.

In October, Shirley published an hour-and-a-half sitdown interview with British far-right anti-immigrant and anti-Islam activist Tommy Robinson, during which he repeated the false claim that there are “40,000 British Muslims” on the United Kingdom’s terror watchlist living in Britain. The figure is a misreading of [a real list](#) by British intelligence agency MI5, which does not include religious identifiers and contains the names of many people who have never traveled to the U.K. “At what point does this break out from a revolution to a civil war?” Shirley asked.

Shirley’s recent viral video in Minnesota was a continuation of this narrative.

In an attempt to lure people into gotcha situations, Shirley visited day care centers and health care facilities that he claims are operated by Somali Americans. Taking a page out of his prank days, he poses as a parent looking for child care for his fictitious son, “Joey.” Throughout the video, Shirley approaches individuals with dark skin or women wearing hijabs, peppering them with questions about supposed “missing” children and whether they were aware of fraud.

Police are called on Shirley and his team twice in the video, including while at one health care complex where a woman explains to a responding officer, “He’s trying to assume because they’re Somalian providers everyone here is fraudulent — he’s here with some kind of propaganda.” He claimed to be “checking rates” for health and child care. Police eventually [escorted him](#) out of the building.

The video’s claims of fraud rely heavily on a Minnesota resident and apparent whistleblower who is identified in the video as David. Toward the end of the video, David claims he was attacked by Somali men who he had confronted about the alleged fraud, describing the men as “very, very violent people.”

Since early December, federal agents have increased their presence in Minnesota’s Twin Cities, profiling and detaining individuals who appear to be Somali, including individuals who are [U.S. citizens](#). The crackdown has also led to the targeting of Latin American immigrant communities in search of undocumented residents. Trump and other right-wing figures have propped up their campaign by falsely depicting “Somalian gangs” who are “roving the streets” of Minneapolis and St. Paul, “looking for prey,” the president said on [social media](#).

Even though Shirley’s video claims to have exposed new truths about fraud in Minnesota, the day care facilities highlighted in the video have previously been spotlighted as problematic by local ABC News affiliate, [KSTP](#), as well as the [state government](#), which earlier this year began to increase [oversight](#) of funding to day care facilities over similar fraud concerns.

The most effective way to combat fraud is increased oversight, said Pottraz Acosta. The recent crackdown in Minnesota, which has been exacerbated by Shirley’s video, she said, is not the kind of oversight that will prevent bad actors from exploiting public funds. The issue

of anti-Somali sentiments is also a problem within Minnesota, she said, with residents facing demeaning stereotypes and unsubstantiated speculation that they are sending money to al-Shabab, the Somali militant group on the U.S foreign terror list.

This narrative, perpetuated locally and nationally, “feeds into larger narratives around certain immigrant communities,” Pottraz Acosta said. “There are bad actors in every community and just because certain people commit fraud, it doesn’t mean that every person who fits that same demographic profile is a bad actor.”

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