

VIOLENCE



Some critics claim, particularly after episodes of gun violence in the U.S., that video games lead to violent behavior. However, the scientific record and real-world evidence make clear that there is no causal link between video games and violence. In study after study, leading independent researchers have found no evidence that video games trigger violent behavior. The U.S. Supreme Court reached the same conclusion nearly a decade ago. Perhaps most tellingly, many of the video games with violent themes sold in the U.S. are also sold in major foreign markets; yet, the level of violent crime in those foreign markets remains considerably lower than that in the U.S., suggesting that other factors are at play.

Further, the video game industry has long been a leader in the effort to ensure that games, particularly those with violent themes, are used by people of the appropriate age and maturity level. Creating a positive, inclusive and safe experience for players of all ages is an essential priority of the video game industry.

Independent Research Finds No Causal Link Between Video Games and Violence

Studies by leading independent researchers confirm there is no causal link between video games and violent behavior. These studies both debunk earlier research found to have been biased by ideology or flawed in methodology and have examined new data using commonly accepted research protocols.

Here are some illustrative studies:

- Drummond, A., Sauer, J.D. and Ferguson, C.J., Do Longitudinal Studies Support Long-term Relationships Between Aggressive Game Play and Youth Aggressive Behaviour? A Meta-Analytic Examination. Royal Society Open Science 7 (2020): 200373.

“Overall, longitudinal studies do not appear to support substantive long-term links between aggressive game content and youth aggression. Correlations between aggressive game content and youth aggression appear better explained by methodological weaknesses and researcher expectancy effects than true effects in the real world.”

- Przybylski, A.K. and Weinstein, N., Violent Video Game Engagement Is Not Associated With Adolescents’ Aggressive Behaviour: Evidence From A Registered Report, Royal Society Open Science 6 (2019): 171474.

“[T]he results derived from our hypothesis testing did not support the position that violent gaming relates to aggressive behaviour.”

- Kühn, S., Kugler, D., Schmalen, K., et al., Does Playing Violent Video Games Cause Aggression? A Longitudinal Intervention Study, Molecular Psychiatry 24, 1220–1234 (2019).

“Taken together, the findings of the present study show that an extensive game intervention over the course of 2 months did not reveal any specific changes in aggression...neither in comparison to an active control group that played a non-violent video game nor to a passive

control group...To our knowledge, the present study employed the most comprehensive test battery spanning a multitude of domains in which changes due to violent video games may have been expected.”

- DeCamp, W. and Ferguson, C.J., The Impact of Degree of Exposure to Violent Video Games, Family Background, and Other Factors on Youth Violence, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46 (2016): 388. doi: 10.1007/s10964-016-0561-8

“[V]ideo game violence is not a meaningful predictor of youth violence...”

In Upholding First Amendment Protections, the U.S. Supreme Court Found No Causal Link Between Video Games and Violence

The U.S. Supreme Court spoke directly to the issue of video games and real-world violence in a seminal ruling in 2011. In *Brown v. EMA*, the Supreme Court held that video games constitute protected speech and that efforts to limit or ban video game content considered “objectionable” conflict with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The court’s majority opinion, written by Justice Antonin Scalia, addressed the issue of video games and violence head-on:

“Psychological studies purporting to show a connection between exposure to violent video games and harmful effects on children do not prove that such exposure causes minors to act aggressively.”

In so finding, Justice Scalia relied not only on the strong scientific evidence presented, but also on the nation’s cultural traditions and norms:

“California’s argument would fare better if there were a longstanding tradition in this country of specially restricting children’s access to depictions of violence, but there is none. Certainly, the books we give children to read—or read to them when they are younger—contain no shortage of gore.”

As the court made clear, efforts to limit constitutionally protected free expression run counter to democratic norms. They also distract from the true causes of, and viable solutions to, violence in society.

Real-World Evidence Demonstrates That Video Games Do Not Trigger Real-World Violence

The world’s three billion video game players enjoy many of the same video games, including those containing violent content. Yet, the level of violent offenses in foreign markets where those very games are sold remains considerably lower than that in the U.S., suggesting that influences such as the background of the individual, the availability of and access to guns, mental health considerations and other factors are more relevant to understanding the cause of any particular offense. As noted above, efforts to focus the debate on video games detract from finding real solutions.

As outlined in the chart below, consumers in Japan and South Korea spent more per person on video games than consumers in the U.S. Yet, the U.S. had nearly 40 gun-related homicides per

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million people while Japan and South Korea had almost none. Per person, the United Kingdom spends nearly 65% as much as the U.S. on video games, and Canadians spend nearly 80% as much. Yet, both countries have minimal gun-related homicides. Most strikingly, in 2019, the gun death per 100,000 citizens in the U.S. was 3.96. By contrast, in the top five foreign markets for video game sales—China, Germany, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom—the combined gun death rate was 0.21 per 100,000 people.

Moreover, during the last two decades, the overall violent crime in the U.S. decreased dramatically. Since 2000, the number of violent offenses fell from 506 per 100,000 people to 367. At the same time, video game sales more than quadrupled. By any measure, video games do not contribute to violence.



The Video Game Industry Empowers Parents with Tools and Resources to Protect Children

For more than 25 years, the video game industry has worked to ensure that consumers—especially parents and caregivers—have the most comprehensive information and tools needed to make informed decisions about video games. Since 1994, the video game industry’s self-regulatory body, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), has provided parents with age and content ratings for video games and apps to help them make informed decisions about which products are appropriate for their family. These tools have a high level of awareness and use among parents. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has lauded industry efforts to responsibly market its products and has noted that the video game industry “outpaces” other entertainment sectors in having the “strongest self-regulatory code” and “high compliance” with that code.

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In addition, parental controls, offered on virtually all video game devices, offer parents the ability to efficiently set preferences that are appropriate for their household. These controls enable parents to: (i) block video games by age rating category; (ii) manage the amount of money their kids can spend playing video games; and (iii) limit the amount of time their kids can spend playing video games. In addition to being able to set parental controls directly on the console, parents can download easy-to-use smartphone apps for each console to manage what, when and with whom their children can play. ESRB provides a centralized place for parents to obtain step-by-step parental control guides for all the game consoles, Windows computers and other platforms at ParentalTools.org.

The industry also provides in-game tools to enable players to mute or block other players online and to report unwanted interactions.

These safety and wellness features continue to evolve as consumer needs evolve. The video game industry regularly updates parental controls and other product features and tools to help consumers navigate the ever-changing world of video games.