# Video Games and Violence, Explained

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# Why the focus on gaming?

As the USA wonders why so many mass shootings are happening, many politicians have pointed a finger at violent video games. One of the top video game genres is "first-person shooter," where players get points for killing other players. Some of the young criminals who committed a mass shooting have been known to play these types of shooting games and talk about them online. For example, a Norwegian mass murderer said he "trained" by playing *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2.* In August, a 21-year-old mass shooter who killed 22 people in El Paso, Texas, posted many things to social media, including his love for the game *Call of Duty*. In response to this shooting, President Trump blamed "gruesome and grisly video games."

# How violent are today's games?

*Grand Theft Auto*, which has sold 285 million games, is notorious for letting players free roam around a city and hurt or even kill random people in game. In 2003, two teenage brothers said they were acting out *Grand Theft Auto 3* when they fatally shot a random motorist in Tennessee. In the gamer world, games like *Call of Duty* are hailed for their realistic weaponry.

# Are shooters usually gamers?

Some mass shooters are also gamers. For example, the Columbine High School killers played the first-person shooter *Doom.* However, just 4 out of 33 mass murderers at U.S. schools between 1980 and 2018 were known to be video gamers. Patrick Markey, a Villanova University psychology professor who studies video games, points out that about 70 percent of U.S. high school students show interest in violent games, but just a tiny minority engage in real violence. Still, the exceptions are disturbing. For example, the mass shooter in Parkland Florida played 8 to 15 hours of video games a day.

# Do games inspire violence?

About 40 percent of Americans think that video games inspire violence. However, scientists have spent years failing to demonstrate such a link. Last year, German researchers divided 77 participants into three groups: One group played *Grand Theft Auto V* every day for two months, another group played the nonviolent *Sims 3*, and a control group didn't play any video games. Researchers then measured participants' aggression levels— and found no significant differences.

# What is gaming's defense?

People who do not see a link between video games and violence say that video games have always been blamed for real world violence. They say that the highest concentration of video game players is in Japan and South Korea, where many games are violent. However, those countries experience little to no gun violence like in the US. Scientist Katherine Cross says, "Blaming video games is a way avoid avoiding the real problem – our countries' open gun laws and gun culture."