Do Video Games Lead to Mass Shootings? Researchers Say No.

By Maya Salam and Liam Stack

Shortly after the school shooting in Parkland, Fla., President Trump said that violent video games and movies may play a role in school shootings, a claim that has been made — and rejected — many times since the increase in such attacks in the past two decades.

Movies are "so violent," Mr. Trump said at a meeting on school safety on Feb. 22, a week after the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where, the authorities say, a former student, Nikolas Cruz, killed 17 people with a semiautomatic rifle. A neighbor of Mr. Cruz's told The Miami Herald that he played video games, often violent ones, for up to 15 hours a day.

"We have to look at the internet because a lot of bad things are happening to young kids and young minds and their minds are being formed," Mr. Trump said at the gathering of lawmakers at the White House, "and we have to do something about maybe what they're seeing and how they're seeing it. And also video games. I'm hearing more and more people say the level of violence on video games is really shaping young people's thoughts."

"And then you go the further step and that's the movies," he added. "You see these movies, they're so violent, and yet a kid is able to see the movie if sex isn't involved, but killing is involved."

Media scholars say the claims about video games and violent movies — a common one in the wake of mass shootings — does not hold up to scrutiny.

The argument became a common refrain after Columbine.

Mr. Trump is far from the first leader to argue that violence in video games or movies can lead to violence in the real world.

A similar claim was made in the 1940s, when Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York argued that pinball — which was illegal in the city for over 30 years — was "dominated by interests heavily tainted with criminality." The argument that video games and other forms of violent media could be to blame for mass shootings became common after the Columbine massacre in 1999, when two students shot and killed 13 people at Columbine High School outside Denver.

Bill Clinton, then the president, ordered an investigation into advertising practices used to sell violent entertainment.

More recently, the position that video games may play a role in violent behavior is more often cited by conservatives. In 2007, one month after an armed student killed 32 people at Virginia Tech, Mitt Romney said that "pornography and violence" in music, movies, TV and video games were to blame for the carnage both there and at Columbine.

And in 2012, after a gunman, Adam Lanza, killed 26 people, mostly young children, at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn., Wayne LaPierre, who leads the National Rifle Association, put the blame on the entertainment media.

He called the video game industry a "corrupting shadow industry that sells, and sows, violence against its own people" — naming games like Bulletstorm, Grand Theft Auto, Mortal Kombat and Splatterhouse.

The evidence does not support the claim, scholars say.

In a 2005 essay for PBS, Henry Jenkins, a professor at the University of Southern California, said that juvenile crime in the United States was at a 30-year low even though large numbers of young people play video games. "Researchers find that people serving time for violent crimes typically consume less media before committing their crimes than the average person in the general population," he wrote . When it comes to video games, he said, "the overwhelming majority of kids who play do not commit antisocial acts."

According to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, 49 percent of American adults — including roughly equal numbers of men and women — play video games, whether on a computer, a TV, a gaming console, or a portable device like a cellphone or an iPad.

In Japan, about 60 percent of the population played video games in 2016, according to NewZoo , a gaming market research company. But almost no one is killed by a gun in the country, which bans possessing, carrying, selling, or buying handguns or rifles. There were only six gun deaths in Japan in 2014, compared with over 33,000 in the United States, according to GunPolicy.org , which tracks published reports on armed violence, firearm law and gun control.

In 2013, The New York Times looked at research on whether games negatively affect long-term behavior, and more recent science does not contradict these findings.

The argument that violent video games are to blame for real-world violence has been rejected by conservative titans including Justice Antonin Scalia. In 2011, the Supreme Court rejected the claim that violent video games promote real-life violence when it ruled 7 to 2 in Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association that California could not ban the sale of violent video games to children.

"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," said Justice Scalia, writing for the five justices in the majority. "Any demonstrated effects are both small and indistinguishable from effects produced by other media."

Summary

 "Shortly after the school shooting in Parkland, Fla., President Trump said that violent video games and movies may play a role in school shootings, a claim that has been made — and rejected — many times since the increase in such attacks in the past two decades....Media scholars say the claims about video games and violent movies — a common one in the wake of mass shootings — does not hold up to scrutiny." *(New York Times (Online))* The controversy about the impact of video games and violent movies on the increasing number of mass shootings is discussed.

Citations

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