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# Long-term US study finds no links between video games and violence

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Gaming

The researchers concluded that the current media narrative may "distract society from more pressing concerns such as poverty and education"
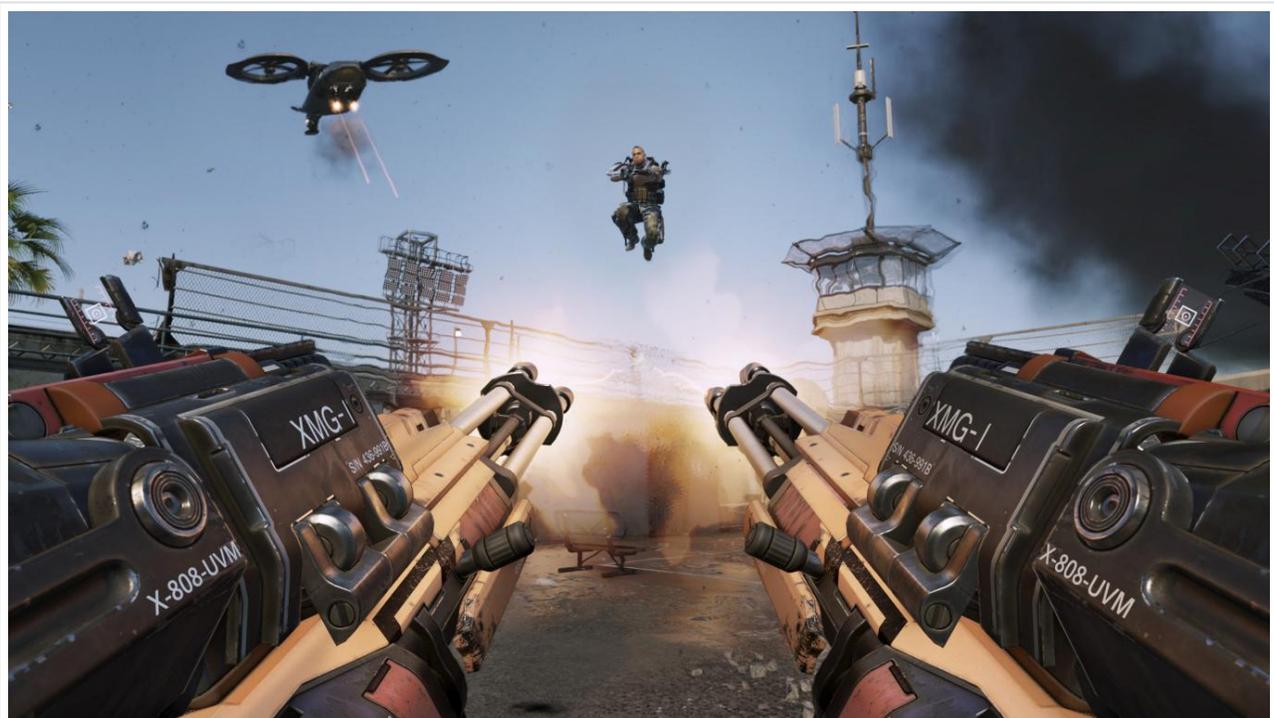
A new long-term study into violent media in the US could help settle the long-standing argument of whether or not violent films and video games are to blame for violence in society.

The research, led by psychologist Christopher Ferguson and published in the Journal of Communication, not only found that there was no link between violent media and behaviour but also questioned the methodology of previous studies suggesting the two were related.

Ferguson and his team point out that many laboratory-based studies into the effect of media violence have measured aggression in test subjects through "less aggressive outcomes ranging from filling in the missing letters of words through delivering nonpainful noise bursts to a consenting opponent."

The study points out that these studies also commonly "provide exposure to brief clips of media, rather than full narrative experiences" and that "the resultant aggressive behaviors are also outside a real-world context in which the aggression appears to be sanctioned by the researchers themselves."

In the first of two historical studies the researchers examined the correlation of violent films and societal violence, analysing the frequency of violent acts in the top-grossing titles between 1920 and 2005.

The study notes that film violence followed "a rough U pattern" during this time period, but that societal violence fluctuated differently, with the latter half of the 20th century even showing an increase in film violence "associated with reduced societal violence".

10 best video games series from Guinness World Records

A second study into video game violence used data from the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) to estimate the violent content of popular games from 1996 to 2011. This was then compared with data on youth violence during the same years, with the study finding a correlation between falling youth violence and the popularity of violent games.

During this time period "youth violence dropped precipitously", the researchers write, "despite maintaining very high levels of media violence in society with the introduction of videogames."

In a press statement Ferguson notes that the media narrative surrounding violent video games and youth violence may be due to the "limited amount of resources and attention" that society can devote to "the problem of reducing crime".

He adds, however, that if the wrong problem is identified, it may "distract society from more pressing concerns such as poverty, education and vocational disparities and mental health."

Ferguson writes: "This research may help society focus on issues that really matter and avoid devoting unnecessary resources to the pursuit of moral agendas with little practical value."

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