

# Substantial Disruption



## The Dangerous and Irresponsible Video Game Diversion

By Mike Tully

*Politics is the diversion of trivial men who, when they succeed at it, become important in the eyes of more trivial men.*

- [George Jean Nathan](#)

Let's begin with a word problem: The United States has [experienced](#) 1,624 mass shootings in 1,870 days. Over the years, many shootings took place [in a school](#), resulting in 137 deaths since Columbine. Overall, the [largest body counts](#) were in Las Vegas (59), Orlando (50), Newtown (28), Sutherland Springs (27), Parkland (17), San Bernardino (16), and Aurora (12). Those are among 35 mass shootings that involved use of an AR-15 style rifle. Many assailants were able to legally acquire their weapons, including the AR-15s, while displaying symptoms of mental imbalance. Choose the most appropriate resolution to the problem:

- A. Prevent the sale of AR-15s and similar weapons, so that would-be mass shooters would not have access to them.
- B. Do nothing.
- C. Ban violent video games.

According to Arizona State Representative Mark Finchem and others, the correct answer is "C." Finchem [voted to suppress debate](#) on whether to ban "bump stocks," the device that magnified the lethality of the Las Vegas slaughter. He said there was a greater danger. "What I am absolutely stunned by is the proliferation of video games that teach our children to kill," he said, adding that video games "teach our children to kill effectively" and "without retribution." He claims video games have "cheapened life."

Finchem is not the only peddler of this myth. [President Trump recently said](#), "I'm hearing more and more people say the level of violence on video games is really shaping young people's thoughts." The NRA takes the same position, denouncing violent video games while, curiously, [marketing its own gun-based video game](#). Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin [blamed video games for gun violence](#) stating, they "celebrate the slaughtering of people."

The media has been no better, frequently jumping to link a mass killer to video games. CBS [falsely reported](#) that Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook mass murderer, "was motivated by violent games." An investigation [debunked](#) that theory. Similarly, Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech assassin, was [linked](#) to violent video games. [Professor Christopher J. Ferguson noted](#) in 2008 in the *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*: "it was something of a shock when investigators concluded that Cho had little to no exposure to violent video games." Yet the myth perpetuates, fueled by individuals who, at best, haven't done their homework or, at worst, push a false narrative to further their political ambitions.

Here's the problem: *video games are make-believe*. We are allowing people who are deeply afraid of something make-believe to influence public policy, including gun laws. Let that sink in for a minute.

In 2015, in [\*Perspectives on Psychological Science\*](#), Professor Ferguson published a meta-analysis of 101 studies examining possible links between exposure to violent video games and increased aggression, reduced prosocial behavior, reduced academic performance, depressive symptoms, and attention deficit symptoms among children and adolescents. His conclusion? "video games, whether violent or nonviolent, have minimal deleterious influence on children's well-being."

A 2014 study in the [\*Psychology of Popular Media Culture\*](#) used four methodologies to compare exposure to violent video games to rates of violent acts. "Contrary to the claims that violent video games are linked to aggressive assaults and homicides," they wrote, "no evidence was found to suggest that this medium was a major (or minor) contributing cause of violence in the United States." Their research yielded a surprise: "Unexpectedly," the authors stated, "many of the results were suggestive of a decrease in violent crime in response to violent video games." One possible explanation is they provide a "catharsis" allowing players "to release their aggression in the virtual world instead of in the real world." This finding was supported by a [recent study by researchers at Virginia Tech](#), who wrote: "Perhaps this indicates that first-person shooter games can serve as outlets for aggression, rather than an indicator of the desire to project one's aggression onto others. This finding is in line with others who have found that violent videogames are unrelated to real-world violence and may, in fact, be inversely related to violent behaviors." Violent video games may actually *decrease* violence.

Why do Finchem, Trump, the NRA and others persist in peddling a false link between violent video games and actual violence when the evidence is overwhelmingly against them? The answer: they are practicing "[whataboutism](#)," defined as a "logical fallacy that attempts to discredit an opponent's position by charging them with hypocrisy without directly refuting or disproving their argument." An [NPR report](#) notes the device "is particularly associated with Soviet and Russian propaganda." Author Shahida Arabi [includes it in her article](#), "20 Diversion Tactics Highly Manipulative Narcissists, Sociopaths And Psychopaths Use To Silence You." Coincidentally, Russian propaganda and narcissism are hallmarks of the Trump era.

The [News Media, Public Education and Public Policy Committee of the American Psychological Association](#) wrote in 2017: "Journalists and policy makers do their constituencies a disservice in cases where they link acts of real-world violence with the perpetrators' exposure to violent video games or other violent media. There's little scientific evidence to support the connection, and it may distract us from addressing those issues that we know contribute to real-world violence."

That's the idea. Finchem, Trump, the NRA and their fellow travelers are using anti-video game propaganda to distract the media and public from their true agenda: advocating a radical and extremist interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment that floods American streets with weapons of war, erasing the line between battlefield and neighborhood. That makes them a hell of a lot more dangerous than any gamer.