

Two-thirds of Americans, 227 million, play video games. For many games were an escape, stress relief in pandemic

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Yes, we did play more video games during the coronavirus pandemic.

Hey, when you are asked to stay at home and social distance as a way to stop or at least slow the spread of COVID-19, who could blame you for bingeing on "Animal Crossing," "Call of Duty" or "Fortnite?"

More than half of players (55%) said they played more games during the pandemic, and most players (90%) said they will continue playing after the country opens up, according to a survey of 4,000 U.S. adults conducted by market research firm Ipsos in February 2021 for the Entertainment Software Association.

For players during the pandemic, [video](#) games were a source of stress relief (55%) and distraction (48%), the survey found.

Video games also served as an escape and a break for children, 71% of parents surveyed said. More than half of parents (59%) said their children played educational games and two-thirds of parents (66%) said video games made the transition to distance learning easier for their children.

More parents began playing games with their kids, too, with 74% of parents saying they play video games with their children at least weekly—up from 55% in 2020, the survey found.

Overall, more Americans—227 million—say they play video games, up from 214 million in the previous survey conducted the previous year.

"When we were doing this survey we had a sense the numbers would go up, but we weren't sure on the scale," Stanley Pierre-Louis, the ESA's president and CEO told U.S. TODAY. "We were excited to see the trend line.... That's just a huge leap. And it was up in all categories."

Other facts from the ESA's 2021 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry, out Tuesday:

- 67% of American adults (aged 18+) are players
- 76% of U.S. children (under 18) are players
- The average video [game](#) player is 31 years old
- 45% of gamers identify as female
- 80% of video game players in the U.S. are over 18
- More than half of all gamers (51%) played 7+ hours weekly.
- The most popular game genre? Casual games, played by 63% of players, followed by action games (39%) or shooter games (39%)

Will we see a downturn in time spent playing video games? Economic data shows people are still playing games "at a really high clip.... My sense is we will still be trending upwards," Pierre-Louis said. "But overall, what we're excited about was a lot (of people) were introduced or reintroduced to games and they are sticking with it."

DFC Intelligence expects [video game](#) sales in the U.S. and Canada to increase 14.6% in 2021, to \$19.6 billion. But players could spend more and spend less time playing, David Cole, the research firm's founder and CEO suggested recently.

To see what gamers thought, I did a very unscientific poll on Twitter and found 24% said they played more during the pandemic and are still playing more; 22% said they played more and are playing less; 34% said they played the same during the pandemic; and 20% said they played less.

Just as with movies and streaming, hits will drive audience. Accounting for movie tickets sold and Disney+ Premier Access rentals, "Black Widow" earned the largest opening weekend since "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" debuted in 2019.

With potential hits such as "Metroid Dread," "Guardians of the Galaxy," "Halo Infinite" and this year's edition of "Call of Duty," expected to

arrive in coming months, there will be plenty of reasons to gamers to return or—maintain contact with—their controllers.

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