

# Wearing-Off of the Lines Between Politics and Games

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How far are video games from politics? It seems like there are a lot of arguments and discourses surrounding politics and games. There are a whole range of ways and amounts of how politics crosses the political sphere. As an example, we can look at *Far Cry 5*; considered controversial by some, and even accused of not being able to articulate a statement of Trumpian America; „a missed opportunity”.<sup>1</sup> One of the ways is probably the most visible – the specific use of games for political campaigning. This came to the wider attention of the public with Barack Obama’s election campaign in 2008, and this happened again with several events within the current US election campaigns. These examples in some ways illustrate how the public, developers, and political parties view this lane between politics and games.

First was Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from the Democratic Party with quite an unusual attempt at encouraging citizens to vote. At her open call for players well-known Twitch streamers reacted and joined her in the game known as *Among Us*. This invitation to vote was significant in some ways – firstly, we can see it as a quite authentic act, since she is a gamer herself (with Silver III rank in *League of Legends*). Then there is the fact that even as a part of a political campaign, the main reason emphasised was the importance of voting, not voting for her party (which, of course, could be the result). The game itself, although simple in graphics and somewhat unoriginal (the game is similar to *Mafia*-style social deduction games) is also remarkable in its mechanics which can be linked to election tactics; finding the truth among gaslighting, accusing and lying. The metaphor continues with crewmates trying to navigate the tasks for their vessel so it functions properly even with imposters ruining their efforts.

The next example is Joe Biden’s campaign in *Animal Crossing: New Horizon* as another interfusion of real-life events into a game that has already held concerts and festivals by real artists. Even when not breaking any of Nintendo’s rules for banning content that would be vulgar, discriminatory, or offensive (since the game is rated an E) or content that would bring player any financial benefit (banning advertising or selling), it was a reason for Nintendo to create a new rule of “refraining from bringing politics into the game”.<sup>2</sup>

This is not a new phenomenon; we can date official political video games back to 2004 but politics within games are much older. Ian Bogost wrote about manufacturing gain from video games in elections in his book *How To Do Things With Videogames*<sup>3</sup> almost 10 years ago; the thing is, politicians are becoming more and more aware of the potential

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1 WRIGHT, S. T.: ‘*Far Cry 5*’ wants to talk about Trump’s America, but it doesn’t know what to say. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018. [online]. [2020-12-16]. Available at: <<https://theoutline.com/post/4042/far-cry-5-review-trump?zd=1&zi=yzviyqah>>.

2 *Animal Crossing: New Horizons Usage Guidelines for Businesses and Organizations*. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020. [online]. [2020-12-16]. Available at: <[https://www.nintendo.co.jp/animalcrossing\\_announcement/en/index.html](https://www.nintendo.co.jp/animalcrossing_announcement/en/index.html)>.

3 For more information, see: BOGOST, I.: *How To Do Things With Videogames*. Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

of games for their preferences (talking about the UK and the US at least). Communication through these games, either designed especially for this purpose or not, is opening new questions about what people and companies are willing to accept within that which they can perceive as leisure time – and even when we still do not know enough about how impactful this campaigning is, it is certainly something to observe and learn from.

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