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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЕ ИГРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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State Policy in the Field of Video Games: Approaches and Prospects

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Abstract. The objective of the article is to identify the most pertinent approaches and prospects for state policy in the field of video games. The author's methodological perspective includes the principles of critical discourse analysis of academic works, comparative study of case studies, and scenario techniques. The author discusses the liberal, conservative, and hybrid approaches to state video game policy. The author also underlines the difference between active and reactive video game policies. The identified approaches, issues, prospects, and aspects are updated in terms of their relevance to present Russian state policy tasks. The study also aims to define the ecumenical paradigm of state sovereignty. The importance of collaboration between the state, developer representatives, and the player community in regulating the industry and the video game market is emphasized. The author's grasp of the political industrial phenomenon helps to describe the opportunities and risks of such contact. To better comprehend the prospects for the transition of Russian state video game policy, basic development scenarios are described.

Государственная политика в сфере видеоигр: подходы и перспективы

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Аннотация. Цель исследования — выявление наиболее важных подходов и перспектив государственной политики в сфере видеоигр. В качестве методологической оптики автор обращается к принципам критического дискурс-анализа академических работ, сравнительного анализа кейс-стади и приема сценариотехник. Среди наиболее значимых направлений государственной видеоигровой политики автором выделены либеральный, консервативный и гибридный подходы. Кроме того, акцентируется отличие активной видеоигровой политики от ее реактивного варианта. Выявленные подходы, проблемы, перспективы и аспекты актуализируются с точки зрения значимости для задач государственной политики современной России. Также предпринята попытка концептуализации ойкуменной модели государственного суверенитета. Обоснована важность сотрудничества государства, представителей разработчиков и сообщества игроков в регулировании индустрии и рынка видеоигр. Перспективы и риски такого взаимодействия обозначены через авторское осмысление феномена политической индустрии. Для понимания перспектив трансформации российской государственной видеоигровой политики определены базовые сценарии ее развития.

Ключевые слова: государственная видеоигровая политика, видеоигры, компьютерные игры, регулирование, рынок видеоигр, суверенитет, политическая индустрия

> After all, they call this cheating and various similar names,
> but this is subtlety of mind, development.
> *N.V. Gogol. "The Gamblers"*

Introduction

The gaming universe intersects with many spheres of modern human social life. The phenomenon of homo ludens, described by J. Huizinga in the book of the same name, is currently associated not only with the gaming industry and communities of players but also has a direct relationship to the formation of new digital spheres, entire virtual universes, for the dissemination of narratives, values, cultural and political codes, meanings, and the very interpretation of the past in which large technology corporations, states, political and social groups, as well as extremist organizations, compete. It is no coincidence that Huizinga noted that "The most visible initial manifestations of human social activity are all already permeated with play" [Huizinga 2021]. But as soon as the symbols of a particular country, the images of certain societies and states, authorities, elites, parties, ideologies, political leaders, ethnic and religious groups of the population appear in video games, the latter in one way or another converge with the field of public policy. And this is a challenge for political power, since video games can in fact offer those options for the political structure of society that may seriously differ from those already existing in a particular country. Research shows that some video games are politically oriented towards democratic (39 %) or autocratic (39 %) systems, with relatively little choice between the two (22 %). According to researchers, this situation means that video games have certain potential to influence the political beliefs of players [Gutwenger et al. 2024].

The relevance of this issue is especially obvious against the background of the decree signed by the Russian president on state policy in the field of historical education in 2024, in Article 13, paragraph "ж" ("zh") of which the need for the emergence of "…mechanisms of state and public control over the existing computer games market to exclude the uncontrolled distribution of digital products that create a distorted view of the events of Russian and world history, as well as the place and role of Russia in the world"[1] is outlined. The measures taken by the Russian state are logical, since video games are both a commercial area and a tool for influencing public opinion [Belov 2021].

Political power will in any case react to attempts by other actors and interested parties to use video games as a digital mechanism for adjusting,

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[1] *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 8, 2024 "On approval of the Fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of historical education".* Retrieved January 7, 2025, from http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202405080001?index=1

transforming or constructing identities, value preferences, worldviews among certain categories of the population in the form of certain practices of state policy. Especially if these changes can affect the values on which the social order and the current political regime of the country were formed. The facts that the content of modern video games touches on the topics of political power, the ruling elite and has a clearly evaluative nature are cited in some studies [Volodenkov et al. 2024]. Another thing is that political power can react to these facts in different ways, ranging from purely economic or legal instruments, organizing and strengthening public condemnation through the media to direct censorship. Therefore, state policy is not always easy to identify in the form of some concentrated manifestations.

For the sake of stylistic consistency and brevity, this article will refer to state policy in the field of video games as state video game policy. It can be conditionally divided into two approaches—reactive and active—based on the notion that political authority should focus on either tactics or strategy. Reactive state video game policy consists of a series of measures aimed at developing and enacting regulatory legal acts and laws governing the activities of the video game industry, the sale of video game products, and prohibitions on extremist propaganda, radical symbols, and the depiction of offensive, violent scenes. As the term implies, reactive policy refers to the state's current measures in response to the reality of destructive, radical content in video games or the creation of antisocial impacts and processes as a result of them. Active state video game policy, on the contrary, implies that political authorities have developed a memory policy strategy that is primarily concerned with the future—forming citizenship, respect for the country's history, culture, symbols, traditional values, historical events, and figures through video games.

At the same time, it should be recognized that ideal types of state video game policy in their pure form cannot exist. Rather, the political authorities will construct various types of combinations, ensembles of measures of active and reactive policies. Such combinations appear in the conditions of inevitable changes in economic conditions, political situation, social structure in the country, the emergence of new external and internal challenges and risks for the state. In other words, this means that if earlier, in some conditions, the political authorities used mainly measures of reactive state video game policy, then later, under completely different circumstances, they can move to a more active form of regulation of the video game industry. This also applies to the hybridization of hard and soft measures of this type of state policy. Consequently, such tactical and strategic strokes to the portrait of understanding state video policy will not suffice.

By the way, a researcher from Indiana University, J. Mailland, in his recently published monograph, describes three types of approaches

to video games in different countries [Mailland 2024]: in some, the content of video games is regulated through limited legal mechanisms or industry practices without an active role of the state; in others, on the contrary, there is active intervention of the state; and in others, hybrid systems are used. If the first approach to the implementation of state video game policy can be conditionally called liberal and the second conservative, then the third is hybrid. Obviously, the key premise guiding this classification will be the extent of state intervention in the video game industry. The liberal approach is differentiated by the fact that corporate developers and non-governmental groups play the primary roles in providing evaluations. It is claimed that developers have a better understanding of their products' features, and non-governmental rating systems can independently set the age limit for purchasers. Furthermore, gaming industry lobbyists may oppose political authorities' attempts to manage the business. The liberal approach is frequently disguised with a legal, normative mask to absolve the state of responsibility for the facts of corporations' influence on citizens' consciousness through digital media channels, but this does not negate the practice of implementing an active form of state video game policy.

The conservative approach implies that the state is the key regulator in the field of video games, develops and offers appropriate regulatory tools for examination, control of the content available there in order to protect public order, health or traditional spiritual and moral values of citizens. The strategy of the conservative approach assumes that the state takes on a large share of responsibility for regulating the video game market, therefore, in case of various problems, all claims will be addressed to it. On the other hand, in the absence of monitoring by civil society, real communities of players and associations of representatives of the video game industry, with a conservative approach, the process of gradual build-up of various types of restrictions and prohibitions in this industry is not excluded. Whereas a combination of components of liberal and conservative systems forms a hybrid approach. Variations of hybrid policy can also manifest themselves in the process of transition from a liberal approach to a conservative one and vice versa. It is desirable to take into account both coordinate systems (active-reactive and liberal-hybrid-conservative) when conducting a political analysis of state video game policy, but this is not always easy. Of course, such a division is approximate, but in any case it turns out that either the state or corporate actors retain the main role in regulating the video game industry. Citizens and gamers definitely have certain levers of influence in this area—from petitions to direct boycott—but so far they are much less involved in developing regulatory mechanisms. Hence, the goal of this article will be to identify the specifics of approaches and prospects for state video game policy.

Methodology

The methodological basis of this article will be based on the principles of several scientific points. To begin, applying critical discourse analysis to academic literature will allow us to evaluate the findings of many specialized research, initiatives, and diametrically opposite points of view in order to identify the key approaches to state video game policy. Secondly, a comparative review of case studies involving facts, attempts, and variations of this sort of state policy will aid in determining the causes, specifics, and quality level of its growing approaches. Finally, in order to determine the fundamental trajectories of the evolution of such approaches to state video game policy, triptych scenario technology parameters will be used, with an emphasis on depicting optimistic, pessimistic, and realistic situations. The methodology takes its name from such a form of art as a triptych of painters (for example, The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch, The Elevation of the Cross by Peter Paul Rubens, or Faust by Mikhail Vrubel) and the conditions for dividing scenario horizons into three main clusters. It should be explained that the use of large-scale scenarios is largely arbitrary (of course, there could be many more of them) and was chosen for a clearer comparison with the interests of the three most important actors associated with the realities of state video game policy—citizens (consumers), the state (political and legal regulator) and corporations (developers). The emphasis on the state in the scenario will be made due to the fact that it remains the basic actor determining the direction of state video game policy.

As a theoretical framework, the work will be based on the model of the cultural industry by M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, according to the key thesis of which "The striving of the cultural industry for uniformity, which stops at nothing, is a harbinger of the coming uniformity in the political sphere" [Horkheimer, Adorno 2024]. According to the analytical scheme of Horkheimer and Adorno, the cultural industry is not simply associated with capitalist corporate actors, but is capable of reproducing a certain image of a person, patterns of behavior, forming a social hierarchy and a surrogate replacement for meaning, claiming an ideological function, reducing the distance between everyday reality and fiction, exercising power over the consumer through entertainment, a technically conditioned prevalence of stereotypes. Russian political scientist G.K. Ashin, who singled out the entertainment industry, wrote that it makes sense not to divide culture into elite and mass, but to study a special pseudo-culture involved in managing mass consciousness [Ashin 1971]. If video games are considered the result of one of the types of cultural industry, then it is logical to include developer corporations oriented towards consumer-players and existing in the normative space of the state as regulators of this form of activity in the latter. The model of the cultural industry perfectly complements the concept of stereotypes by W. Lippmann, who wrote about cultural codes—a set of rules and moral

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norms, the creators of which influence the type of behavior of people. Cultural codes can be based on reproducible stereotypes—established ideas involved in the mechanism of interpreting current events [Lippmann 2023].

But the video game industry is not just one of the entertainment industries, but a sphere of generating meanings, symbols, preferences, including political content. Based on the model of Horkheimer and Adorno, we can propose a hypothesis according to which the cultural industry of video games is capable of transforming into a political industry if political actors begin to interfere more actively in its activities. It is quite possible that, just as cultural codes are formed in the conditions of the cultural industry, political codes [Fedorchenko 2017] can be created by the political industry, constructed by political actors on the basis of the already developed cultural industry of video games. G. Enzensberger, criticizing the model of Horkheimer and Adorno, proposed to call the production of opinions, prejudices, judgments, consciousness in the course of social interaction between people and in the conditions of modern technologies, media and the game format the industry of consciousness. Enzensberger captured the key feature of this phenomenon: the consciousness industry becomes a mechanism for stabilizing certain power relations [Enzensberger 2016], which again brings us closer to the concept of the political industry. Naturally, the ideas of Horkheimer, Adorno, Lippmann, Ashin, and Enzensberger can be used for contemporary political analysis only if we take into account the technological transformations that have occurred since the publication of their works: the emergence of large technological corporations, a developed video game industry, and artificial intelligence systems.

The political industry can strengthen or weaken the stereotypes circulating in video games. Meanwhile, in this article, the state will be considered as the most important political actor, creating the political industry, and determining the vector of state video game policy—reactive or active, liberal, conservative or hybrid. The political industry is formed from the increasing mediacratic rapprochement of government bodies and large corporations regarding the implementation and support of a certain type of state policy and political agenda. More specifically, the political industry is a well-established system of regular state orders to technology and video game corporations to form the political narratives necessary for the state through video games, film production, digital communications, animation, comics, etc. The approximate structure of the political industry may consist of corporate developers, intermediary sellers, advisory councils developing age rating systems, whose activities are regulated by the state. The expert community, representatives of public organizations, as well as the gaming community and cybersport teams are capable of communicating a synergistic effect to such a political industry. Without public and expert components, the political industry simply becomes another form of state censorship. All these components of the

political industry ensure that video games do not destroy or replace the country's values with the ones alien to them.

Researchers note that regulation of content and access to video games does not necessarily lead to the deterioration of video games or their production [Mailland 2024]. Here it is necessary to immediately stipulate that not only the state may want to transfer the cultural industry to the level of the political industry. Radical political forces, parties, terrorist and extremist organizations, hostile states striving for a coup d'etat and total transformation of public order in a particular country may be interested in this process too. At present, when the transmission of values, ready-made political models of the world, is no longer imaginable without digital technologies, the video game industry is capable of becoming an area of information wars [Rastorguev 2014]. It is noteworthy that due to the growth of such threats and challenges, the state may just move to a more active state video game policy, considering the reactive model as anachronistic and risky. If the creation of a political industry system is not initiated by the state, then, most likely, this process will be carried out by its competitors or even hostile forces.

Analysis of Cases of State Video Game Policy

One of the first initiatives to regulate the video game business emerged in response to the uproar surrounding the severe deaths in the video game Mortal Kombat, which triggered a US Senate investigation (1993). The US government and public's interest in this issue prompted the video game industry to establish a separate non-governmental ratings commission (ESRB—Entertainment Software Ratings Board) to regulate the age rating system [Robinson 2012]. However, there are still no legal criteria for games to be graded in the United States [Mailland 2024].

Another attempt at regulation emerged in the wake of the student-planned and organized school shootings in the United States in the late 1990s. Although there were different causes for the shootings in American schools, the authors noted a similarity in that violent video game users were among the perpetrators of these incidents. For example, the perpetrators of the mass murder at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, were fans of the game Doom and believed that they were at war with society. One of the killers even adapted the game to a scenario similar to his own reality. Against this background, initiatives to restrict access to video games arose among the American political establishment and the public [Robertson 2008]. However, the approach of the American government to this issue has remained largely liberal—the US District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, in its decision in the case of Entertainment Association of America v. Kendrick, ruled that video games fall under the protection of the First Amendment, comparing them to such works as The Odyssey, The Divine

Comedy, and War and Peace. In 2011, the US Supreme Court also ruled that restrictions adopted in California on the rental and sale of violent video games to minors are contrary to constitutional norms. While a 2002 Anti-Defamation League study acknowledged that the proliferation of such "white power games" like Camp Rat Hunt, Shoot the Blacks, and Concentration and Ethnicity Cleansing is part of the strategy of extremist groups to recruit new members from among young people [Mailland 2024].

The dominance of the liberal approach in American video game public policy does not at all contradict the development of its active form. There is evidence that the political powers of the United States, as well as the governments of Canada, Ireland, Japan, and South Korea, are extremely interested in state intervention in the video game industry. A. Al-Rawi from Simon Fraser University notes that the US Department of Defense can be considered the most important stakeholder in the active penetration of the state into the sphere of video games since 1960. The military even created its own eSports team in 2018. The rather realistic tactical shooter America's Army was specifically developed by the army and funded by the US government, actually being used to lure new recruits. After the creation of the Kuma company by a group of retired US military personnel in 2004, Reality Games received support from the US Department of Defense for the development of the video game Kuma War. The US military uses video games to conduct training exercises, alternative assessments of weapons systems, and simulations, while the US government intends to use this channel to promote its ideological and political narratives [Al-Rawi 2024]. It is not for nothing that Horkheimer and Adorno wrote that "the entire world passes through the filters of the cultural industry" [Horkheimer, Adorno 2024]. Such observations indicate that, despite the liberal nature of American state video game policy, it still contains elements of the transfer of the cultural industry of video games towards the construction of a specific political industry with state-oriented and patriotic narratives on its basis.

It is interesting to turn to the British case. In many ways, the United Kingdom's attempts to begin regulating the video game industry can be considered quite liberal, similar to the actions taken by the American government and based on the precautionary principle. At the same time, the British state video game policy has gone through three stages in its evolution [Robinson 2012]. In its first stage of "selective ignorance" from 1985 to 1993, the video game industry, with rare exceptions, was practically unregulated by the Video Recording Act (1984). From the second stage of "industry-led regulation", covering the period from 1994 to 2007, a dual system of video game classification began to form. It included a state regulator in the form of the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and a corporate association, ELSPA (Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Associations), which offers ratings[2]

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[2] Rating systems involve assigning a specific rating to products, including video games, that

for most video games whose features do not fall under the rules set by the BBFC. The third stage of the "statutory universal system" began in 2007, when the British government decided to review video game ratings. In addition, the government joined the pan-European PEGI rating system (Pan European Game Information).

According to N. Robinson, the British liberal approach is not producer-oriented, but consumer-oriented, creating conditions, paradoxically, for the growth of violent video games. Robinson is sure that such a decision is politically expedient for the British government, which is not ready to prosecute parents for their irresponsibility in purchasing violent games for their children [Robinson 2012]. The American ESRB and European PEGI are applied on a voluntary basis, but retailers try to adhere to their age-recommended labels, which in turn forces corporate developers to also take into account non-governmental rating systems [Kiraly, Griffiths et al. 2018]. Of course, the liberal approach leaves more freedom of action for corporate developers, but on condition that they do not violate the current legislation, legal norms established by the state as a political regulator. As for the third party, citizens (players or their parents), they are left with a more secondary role in regulating the video game market. Video game rating systems, implemented within the framework of the liberal approach to state video game policy, reproduce the described format of relations between the state, corporations and citizens. Horkheimer and Adorno made an apt and in many ways prophetic comment on this problem: "The consumer is left with no other methods of classification than those that would already be anticipated by the schematism of production itself" [Horkheimer, Adorno 2024]. Despite the essence of liberal policy, citizens cannot influence the mechanisms for developing video game ratings, which become instruments of power in the hands of representatives of corporate regulators.

The German case is strikingly different from the American and British ones. Since 1994, the Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle system has been in place in this country (USK, Self-regulation of Entertainment Software). The rating system is financed by the corporate industry, but the ratings themselves are set by representatives of the German government and independent experts, and their principles by ministries of the federal states and by law. According to these principles, violent video games may not be sold to persons under 18 years of age. Violations are punishable by a fine of approximately 50,000 euros [Mailland 2024]. Following the Emsdetten school shooting (2006), the German government took legislative measures that imply greater government control over the rating sphere, a special media index, which may include certain video games based on the violent, sexually-ethical and racially-hateful content they contain. Games that promote violence, war, or incite criminal activity may be banned.

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is related to the recommended age of the buyer at the time of purchase.

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Unlike the American and French legal systems, the German legal system can provide for bans on video games based on Article 5 of the Constitution (which allows restrictions on freedom of the media due to the protection of youth) [Robertson 2008]. Moreover, Germany has tried to extend its regulatory system and practice to all countries of the European Union. Censorship in German releases of games from the Wolfenstein series (for example, Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus) included the removal of Hitler's moustache, renaming Mein Führer in Mein Kanzler and the replacement of "Nazis" with "regime" or "wolves" [Piggott 2019]. The connection between power and a certain promoted style in cultural content was long ago noted by Horkheimer and Adorno, who discovered that "the concept of true style in the culture industry reveals itself as an aesthetic equivalent of the concept of power" [Horkheimer, Adorno 2024]. The strengthening of such tendencies will mean, in the terminology of L. Althusser, the manifestation of an ideological apparatus built into the structure of the political industry.

Rather, the current political authorities in Germany fear the revival of Nazi ideas and narratives through popular video games, which are often a media channel for the dissemination of stereotypes regarding the image of the enemy and preferred forms of power, social and political relations. After all, the creators of cultural codes select typical situations, provoking a certain type of behavior [Lippmann 2023], while political actors (from radical groups to states, including foreign ones) are able to lay down certain political codes through the video game industry that have evaluative interpretations in relation to specific ideologies, parties, historical facts. But German state video game policy cannot be called consistent. Thus, if at first, due to the glorification of racism, violence, and the depiction of Nazi symbols, German censors banned games such as Atari Battlezone, Wolfenstein 3D, Manhunt, Mortal Kombat, Rockstar Games, then in 2018 Wolfenstein 3D was nevertheless approved by the USK rating board after a decision by the Stuttgart Attorney General [Mailland 2024]. Thus, the German case would be more correctly associated with a hybrid approach to state video game policy. Unlike the United States, Germany's video game policy is more reactive and does not yet even claim to create a full-fledged political industry. There are only legislative components, prerequisites for the creation of such a political industry in the future under certain circumstances (for example, due to the coming to power of political forces interested in a sharp change in the political course of the state against the backdrop of migration processes and the demographic situation in the country).

An attempt to create a political video game industry based on the existing video game market can be easily traced in the case of the Republic of Korea. At first, the South Korean authorities took a conservative path, close to the Chinese version. The state video game policy of this country for 2018 included the following components: a shutdown system (government blocking of minors' access to games at certain

times, similar to government measures in China, Vietnam and Thailand); selective shutdown policy (blocking of games by the authorities at the request of the players' guardians or at the request of the minors themselves); fatigue system (government-imposed control by corporations over the player's time spent playing the game, similar to measures in China) [Kiraly, Griffiths et al. 2018].

However, the government has gradually relaxed regulations, intending to turn the country into a hub for digital technology development [Mailland 2024]. In 2022, the South Korean government lifted its ban on minors under 16 playing video games at night. The restrictions were deemed ineffective, as there was an increase in the types of games that did not fall under the law. Like the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other countries, South Korea has adopted non-governmental measures to regulate video games. These include, for example, parental control mechanisms, meaning that with the help of a gaming corporation, parents can set up content filters for minors, monitoring (tracking the use of a device or player activity), game time limits, limiting the amount of game time spent in Internet cafes, reminiscent of similar measures in Thailand. That is, South Korean state video game policy uses a hybrid approach, without relying solely on state regulation. The unbalanced actions of the ministries of the South Korean state itself also hinders the development of a holistic political industry of video games. Thus, if the Ministry of Health and Welfare initially advocated strict control over "electronic entertainment rooms", fearing gaming addiction [Mailland 2024], then the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism regarded the policy of disconnecting minors from video games as a violation of the country's Constitution. Among the supporters of restrictive measures are the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Health, and among the opponents is the Korean Communications Commission [Kiraly, Griffiths et al. 2018]. Enzensberger warned about similar contradictions that could arise in the consciousness industry [Enzensberger 2025].

Modern China has taken a more conservative approach to implementing state video game policy. Due to concerns about gaming addiction, China's National Press and Publication Administration in 2019 introduced restrictions for underage gamers, stipulating three hours of gaming on holidays and weekends, 90 minutes of gaming on weekdays, and a ban on gaming from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. In 2021, the Chinese government, citing parental concerns, decided to reduce the permitted time to an hour on Sundays, Saturdays, Fridays, and holidays from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., increasing the intensity and frequency of government inspections to ensure compliance with the restrictions. Some critical authors have even compared the Chinese measures to the harsh laws of the Athenian politician Draco, calling them draconian, ineffective, and suggesting that they be revised, as another ancient Greek politician, Solon, did [Colder Carras, Stavropoulos et al. 2021].

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L. Xiao strongly disagrees with this position, on the contrary, he believes that these measures are effective, as they reduce the waste of time on video games and protect consumers from excessive spending, citing a report by Tencent Corporation. Xiao believes that defining Chinese policy as draconian is a value judgment, since such a vision does not take into account the experimental nature of the restrictions being introduced, the difference between Chinese and Western values: what the younger generation and scientists in the West may consider draconian measures, may be regarded as a preemptive decision by young people or their parents in China [Xiao 2022]. At the same time, Xiao recalls that the restrictions on loot boxes (games that practice monetization) in force in Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are not called draconian. However, another study found that China's tightening of state video game policies, while restricting hardcore gamers, led to more video viewing and various forms of circumvention of those policies, from renting game accounts (which was illegal) to using a family member to authenticate (which became more common even as corporations introduced facial recognition technology) [Zhou, Liao et al. 2024].

It is believed that the Chinese state video game policy, firstly, initially implied measures of state support for the video game industry, which grew from the domestic market to export to foreign markets of other countries. The country has introduced procedures for approving imported video games. Secondly, the Chinese policy took into account the experience of the South Korean industry, whose popular video games have become an example for Chinese video game developers. It is noteworthy that Korean video games were able to penetrate the Chinese market due to their cultural and value proximity, while Western ones have not achieved comparable success. At the same time, sometimes the peculiarities of such a policy of China are explained by the course of its leadership towards a kind of neo-technonationalism [Jiang, Fung 2017]. Other authors call attempts to strengthen state policy in any digital sphere a similar category of cybernationalism [Becerra, Waisbord 2021], including Russia, Iran and China among the supporters of such a course. And yet, the concepts of neo-technonationalism and cybernationalism seem ambiguous and incorrect. The terminology of digital sovereignty is more suitable for such a state-oriented policy. Chinese regulation of the video game industry involves suppressing anti-patriotic actions, taking into account the politics of memory, banning content that distorts Chinese culture, history, and the contribution of national heroes to it. It should be noted that the protection of Chinese culture means monitoring measures in relation to traditional, socialist, and revolutionary values [Beschatnov, Egorov 2023].

It is possible that various directions and forms of state video game policy are recorded by political scientists in modern countries not only due to internal problems of the illegal market, growing dependence on games, aggression, but also in response to external challenges of digital colonization and digital colonialism. Digital colonization can include certain measures of large foreign

gaming and technology corporations to create modern types of neocolonial dependence in sovereign states through the distribution of video games, software, digital technologies and other products. When the growth of such neocolonial practices reaches its apogee in terms of stimulating digital desovereignization, conditions are formed for establishing the order of digital colonialism—an entire system of indirect dependence of sovereign states on other states through large foreign video game and technology corporations. According to M. Kwet, an employee of Yale University and the University of Johannesburg [Kwet 2019], such a system of digital colonialism and technological expansion is used by the United States to create its political dominance in independent states. Moreover, "…following the commandments of efficiency, the technique involved turns into psychotechnics, a method of dealing with people" [Horkheimer, Adorno 2024]. In other words, if, in the current conditions of the crisis of international institutions, economic and geopolitical competition, a country with a huge audience of video game consumers like China does not create its own developed political industry with patriotic and state-oriented narratives on the basis of the cultural industry of video games, then the United States will do this through corporations that, for example, are their residents. In this regard, Lippmann drew attention to the following feature: "…Americanization, at least outwardly, is the replacement of European stereotypes with American ones… This changes thinking, and subsequently, if the seeds sprout, it changes the general perception" [Lippmann 2023].

The case of the state video game policy of Vietnam in some respects has similarities with the actions of the Chinese government. Since 2013, the country has had a special decree No. 72/2013/ND-CP, according to which the state classified video games into several categories based on the nature of the interaction between players, the game and the corporation's server system[3]. The classification of players by age was linked to the scenario and content of the video game. This document (Article 32) spells out specific prohibitions on incitement to violence, depiction of terrorism, the use of immoral, provocative content in games that contradicts cultural and moral traditions, distorting and destroying them. Players, on the basis of the requirement of the Ministry of Information and Communications, had to register personal information. And, since video games are often multiplayer, which requires access to the Internet, they fell under the prohibitions stipulated in Article 5 of this government document (prohibition of using the Internet, online information to counter the state, promote social vices, cause harm to public order, national security, incite hatred on the basis of nationality, etc.).

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[3] *72/2013/NĐ-CP. Nghị định. Quản lý, cung cấp, sử dụng dịch vụ Internet và thông tin trên mạng.* Retrieved January 7, 2025, from https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Cong-nghe-thong-tin/Nghi-dinh-72-2013-ND-CP-quan-ly-cung-cap-su-dung-dich-vu-Internet-va-thong-tin-tren-mang-201110.aspx

POLITICAL GAME STUDIES

Since December 25, 2024, a new decree No. 147/2024/ND-CP has been in effect in Vietnam, which has consolidated additional regulatory functions of the state in the field of video games[4]. The document allows enterprises and players to use bonus points and virtual units only for exchange for virtual items in accordance with the stated meaning and permitted class of the game, but not for the purpose of converting into cash or other real money. Corporations are responsible for the video game services provided and approved content, and account registration for players under 16 years of age must be carried out only by a parent or guardian responsible for the game content and time allocated for the game. In addition, gaming corporations and enterprises providing video services are now required to provide the state with player data upon request. The identified changes in Vietnamese state policy, an appeal to the protection of traditional values, indicate its quite conservative orientation, but also reactive, in essence.

After analyzing the cases of state video game policy, we will move on to defining its main development scenarios.

Scenarios for the Development of State Video Game Policy

To more clearly define scenarios for the evolution of state video game policy, it is logical to evaluate their optimistic, pessimistic, and realistic options in relation to societal and Russian state problems, rather than in a broad, abstract manner. It is also preferable to create three fundamental scenarios that consider the interests of players and developer corporations, not only the state. This viewpoint, of course, does not negate the state's primary involvement in video game regulation or the development of a political industry built on patriotic narratives.

When discussing the optimistic scenario for the Russian state as the main actor in state video game policy, it is necessary to take into account the coincidence of a number of necessary conditions. In this scenario, the state has no serious obstacles to the implementation of a reactive form of policy and strengthens its powers in terms of regulating the industry and the video game market. The state develops relatively high-quality legislation concerning the relationship between players, sellers-intermediaries and developer corporations. Mandatory restrictions apply to video game content that has anti-government content and serves the purpose of inciting hatred on various grounds. But in the optimistic scenario, the state relies not on a reactive, but on an active direction in the development of video game policy. In this case, an advisory council is formed, including independent experts, representatives of the state, public organizations, player-consumers, developer

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[4] *Nghị định 147/2024/NĐ-CP: Quản lý chặt chẽ dịch vụ trò chơi điện tử trên mạng và thông tin trên internet.* Retrieved January 7, 2025, from https://mic.gov.vn/nghi-dinh-147-2024-nd-cp-quan-ly-chat-che-dich-vu-tro-choi-dien-tu-tren-mang-va-thong-tin-tren-internet-197241227124622733.htm

corporations, sellers, which has real functions in the development of age rating systems, restrictions for underage players.

On the one hand, the active direction of the policy includes regular monitoring of myths, stereotypes, distortion of the past, direct falsifications in historical and other video games. On the other hand, active video game policy is supplemented by state funding (from permanent federal programs and projects to periodic grants for developers), aimed at familiarizing citizens with the historical continuity of Russian statehood, forming a consistent identity of Russians, citizenship, a patriotic attitude to their history through the industry and the video game market (for example, the Russian government initiated a discourse on the creation of patriotic video games in 2021 [Melentyev 2022]). For players, representatives of gaming communities, the state provides technologically advanced platforms, conditions for the development of national eSports.

An optimistic scenario will be possible for the state, players, corporations, and sellers alike only if the development of state video game policy is based on an ecumenical approach to state sovereignty. The ecumenical (or spheral) approach is based on the concept of a digital ecumene—a system of technological corporations, digital media, carrying out coordinated media activity not only within the country, but also beyond its borders to position, protect the interests, value-civilizational, political and economic agenda of the state that supports them [Fedorchenko 2023]. According to this approach, state sovereignty is a more complex system that is not limited to domestic political and domestic economic problems. In the context of the existence of transnational technological corporations and the construction of multipolarity, macro-regions of different states, the strategy of forming a "friendly circle" of neighboring states around the country is becoming increasingly important, rather than the separation of the state from other states. Unlike the Western colonial model, such a macro-region implies a responsible arbitrator in the form of a state initiating equivalent, mutually beneficial political, economic and cultural relations with surrounding countries, the creation of international organizations. Any macro-region in its period of formation starts from a common history, language, moving to the stage of building closer economic ties, technological standards, a consistent understanding of a common history and the introduction of unified legal systems, joint systems of collective security, including cybersecurity. Thus, the digital ecumene is an "inflorescence of state sovereignties" of independent countries in a common macro-region formed by value, economic and technological ties.

The configuration of the ecumenical approach in the field of video games assumes a combination of the following factors: (1) comprehensive and targeted training by the state (within the framework of educational programs, master's programs) of specialists capable of becoming state- and patriotically-oriented video game developers in the future; (2) a federal project setting the format and criteria for financial support for video game developers; (3) a strategy for promoting Russian video games and Russian

video game corporations on the domestic and foreign markets; (4) an equally important "future-oriented task"—the gradual formation of a macro-regional identity, meaning a system of joint educational programs, grants, research projects, internship programs for teachers, lecturers and students, e-sports competitions based on agreements between states, corporations, representatives of the public, and the expert community from post-Soviet countries and neighboring countries (from Belarus to Mongolia), serving the mission of developing a common, consistent, non-discriminatory model of a common historical past. And if the American state, in reproducing the Western model of macro-regional identity (from the USA to Australia), uses a strategy of protecting democracy, then the Russian state can turn to a strategy of protecting the common historical truth and traditional spiritual and moral values. The political industry of video games will be built more organically and taking into account the values of many cultures and peoples. This option assumes the preservation of the conservative core of the state video game policy in the context of the Special Military Operation and large-scale anti-Russian sanctions.

The pessimistic scenario may mean the strengthening of unilateral prohibitive measures of the state in the sphere of video games with the simultaneous absence of connection of the community of players, experts and associations of video game corporations to the regulatory mechanism. Unlike the optimistic and realistic scenarios, the pessimistic one focuses on the reactive rather than active direction of policy. With the development of such a variant of the ultra-conservative approach, there are threats of the degeneration of state policy into a tough and categorical political industry in the form of a system of censorship of any video games. Building a political industry only through prohibitive, censorship procedures, measures and orders does not exclude the scenario of the formation of a gray market for video games, within the framework of which Russian players will use various options for bypassing state bans, turning to VPN and downloading pirated versions of games. This is especially dangerous with a decrease in state interest in financing its own national programs to support the video game industry.

Another variant of the pessimistic scenario may be a sharp retreat of the political authorities towards a liberal approach to video game policy. In the context of anti-Russian sanctions and the Special Military Operation, liberalization may lead not only to further degradation of the national video game market, but also to the subsequent dominance of Western video games and the final consolidation of Western values and the Western political model of the image of the past, present and future among Russian players. Liberalization of the state video game policy will lead to an increase in the role of foreign gaming corporations in the Russian market and an increase in historical falsifications, historical myths, and political manipulations in video games. The pessimistic scenario in fact does not simply imply a denial of the ecumene approach to the state video game policy, but also the final inclusion of Russia in another, for example, Western digital ecumene,

imposing its digital standards, digital technologies, rules of subordinate, extensive development of national sectors of the economy—from the IT sector to the video game sphere. The development of the country according to such a scenario will lead to digital desovereignization, the dominance of the Western political video game industry, included in the system of Western digital colonialism.

The realistic scenario refers to a hybrid direction of development of the state video game policy, when the political authorities combine active and reactive measures, conservative and liberal approaches to the industry and the video game market. Meanwhile, it is important to stipulate that in the context of serious anti-Russian sanctions and the Special Military Operation, the implementation of the state video game policy will maintain a tendency towards conservative approaches. Rather, the state will pay more attention to historical video games, which provide interpretations of the past, the actions of historical and political figures. The realistic scenario option will show the state's focus on internal methods of implementing video game policy. This does not mean that steps to support the Russian video game industry on the external market will not be discussed at the level of political authorities at all. But attempts to develop macro-regional identity through the mechanism of video games will be undertaken, unfortunately, to a lesser extent. The development of the digital ecumene, macro-regional identity of Russia and the surrounding countries based on an objective attitude to common historical memory will largely depend on a competent and balanced system of interaction with the domestic video game community and the corporate sector.

Reactive measures will include a ban on those video games whose plots are created for children and teenagers, but are aggressive in their meaning, falsify Russian history and demonize the image of Russia, contain destructive content that provokes discord on ethnic, religious, political, cultural and social grounds. This is indicated by the intentions of the Russian political authorities to introduce additional obligations for publishers and distributors of video games, to propose a mechanism for authentication of players, a system for labeling video games related to the specifics of their content[5], as well as the bill "On the activities for the development and distribution of video games on the territory of the Russian Federation", submitted to the State Duma of the Russian Federation in December 2024. The option of strengthening the active direction of the implementation of state video game policy, which may concern individual measures to support the domestic video game industry, should not be completely ruled out. Moreover, such support measures can take into account the protection of such traditional values as, for example, family values or the factor of implementing the memory policy.

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[5] *The State Duma spoke about the project to label video games.* Retrieved January 11, 2025, from https://ria.ru/20250110/videoigry-1993109283.html

Conclusion

Thus, a comparative analysis of cases of state video game policy revealed that the measures, actions, and steps taken in different countries differ significantly, but are primarily concerned with regulating relationships between three key players: the state (political regulator), players (game consumers), and corporations (game developers). Such countries as the United States and the United Kingdom adhere to a liberal approach to state video game policy. Corporate developers and the age rating system retain a major role here. At the same time, the example of the American state confirms that the preference for a liberal approach does not mean a refusal to support an active direction in the implementation of video game policy. Germany and the Republic of Korea can be attributed to a closer hybrid approach to the implementation of this type of policy. The hybrid option combines both market self-regulation measures and government intervention. The conservative approach combines a course on combating anti-government destructive content in video games and protecting traditional values in the country. This approach is practiced by China and Vietnam. Some of its elements can be recorded in the modern rule-making of the Russian Federation.

In addition, the study of video game policy cases allows us to conclude that full-fledged political industries generating only state, traditional, or patriotic-oriented narratives have not yet been created. However, there are individual components of such a political industry, balancing between outright censorship of content and active support of the national video game market. The proposed scenarios are largely conditional, but they roughly show the significance of the ecumenical approach to digital sovereignty. The author's reasoning and assumptions are an invitation to a discussion on the issue of possible vectors, directions, and scenarios for the development of state video game policy in modern Russia.

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