

Video game union efforts soar as the industry's popularity hits a fever pitch

Article

The trend: Labor movements in the video game industry are heating up again. Workers at several major game publishing companies are attempting to organize, and regulatory

agencies like the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) are beginning to pressure firms for alleged union busting.

More on this: The video game industry has a reputation for long working hours, extended periods of “crunch” during a game’s development, and workplace harassment. Now, another wave of unionizing efforts is [on the rise](#) as the industry is experiencing [historic consolidation](#).

- **Activision Blizzard’s [historic buyout](#) by Microsoft** hasn’t spared it from the [sexual harassment scandal](#) that’s plagued the company since last summer. The company was sued by the state of California for its treatment of women in the workplace, which prompted several walkouts from employees, including a recent one over the company’s [vaccine policy](#).
- Activision also received criticism for its treatment of quality assurance (QA) workers, who often work long hours for lesser pay than other development roles. Activision converted over 1,000 QA employees to full-time workers last month, but still faces a possible union effort from QA workers at subsidiary **Raven Software**.
- **Epic Games**, creator of the popular game and [metaverse](#) platform **Fortnite**, was the subject of a recent NLRB complaint from a former Activision and Apple employee who alleged the company refused to hire her because of her outspoken support of unions, [per](#) The Washington Post.

Share of US Teens/Adults Who Play Video Games, by Generation, March 2022

% of respondents in each group

Gen Z	96%
Millennials	96%
Gen X	89%
Baby boomers and seniors	57%

Note: ages 14+; Gen Z born 1997-2007, millennials born 1983-1996, Gen X born 1966-1982, baby boomers born 1947-1965, seniors born 1946 and earlier; respondents were asked to choose their 3 most frequent activities

Source: Deloitte, “Digital media trends survey, 16th edition,” March 28, 2022

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Organization abroad: Union pushes and employee pushback aren’t limited to American video game companies.

- Workers at Canada-based **Bioware**—which itself is owned by **Electronic Arts**—have begun organizing with a Canadian labor group.

- Montreal-based **Ubisoft** is also facing internal strife and high-level departures over its workplace culture and [focus on NFTs](#).
- Even **Nintendo**, the storied Japanese developer which has historically been tight-lipped about internal issues, was recently accused of union busting in a NLRB complaint filed by workers at **Nintendo of America**, per The Washington Post.

Generally, industry leaders have not been supportive of unionization efforts. Former president of Nintendo of America **Reggie Fils-Aimé** said in a recent interview that unions aren't needed if employees are treated well, and Activision Blizzard sent an internal email to workers in December arguing against the need for a union.

- Workers have raised support for labor movements from fans on social media, a sign that consumers support improved working conditions at studios they follow. A crowd-funded [strike fund](#) for Activision employees, for example, has raised over \$380,000.

Why this matters: Video game popularity is at an all-time high, prompting more brands and [advertisers](#) to eye the space than ever before.

- Public sentiment in favor of labor movements is at its highest point since 1965, **per** a September Gallup poll, and publishers looking to find advertising partners may run into trouble if their labor issues create brand safety concerns.