



TOXICITY IN MULTIPLAYER GAMES REPORT

2023

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INTRODUCTION

Strong player connections and vibrant communities are the hallmarks of a successful multiplayer game. In-game interactions encourage retention, but these connections can turn sour when toxic behavior takes root.

This report digs into the latest findings from a study by Harris Poll, commissioned by Unity in 2023. The study focused on three countries: the United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom (U.K.), and South Korea. Respondents include 2,522 players and 407 developers.

Wherever possible, this report draws parallels with the [2021 Toxicity in Multiplayer Games Report](#) to track recent trends in toxicity.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1

Toxic behavior is on the rise.

- The overall percentage of players who report witnessing or experiencing toxic behavior **increased from 68% in 2021 to 74% in 2023**.
- Half of the players surveyed say they regularly encounter toxicity in games.
- Developers are more likely than players to say they've noticed a rise in toxic behavior over the past 12 months (53% of developers compared to 32% of players).
- The specific types of toxic behavior have shifted as cheating or tampering and intended disruption become more prominent.

FINDING 3

Players look to studios to manage game safety.

- **Players see moderators and game studios as the main drivers of game safety**, assigning them 49% and 42% of the responsibility while attributing 45% to themselves.
- **The vast majority of multiplayer gamers (81%) agree that protecting players from toxic behavior should be a priority for game developers**, compared to 77% of U.S. gamers who agreed in 2021.
- Developers should understand that if they are not perceived as taking meaningful responsibility for toxic behavior, other stakeholders in the gaming ecosystem or even government regulators may step in.

FINDING 2

Nearly all players are taking action against toxicity.

- The 2023 stats show lower tolerance for toxicity. More players are taking action in response to toxic behavior (**96% in 2023 vs 66% in 2021**), and these reactions are more diverse.
 - Nearly all multiplayer gamers (96%) have responded to toxic behavior by blocking other players (46%), leaving a game (34%), using in-game reporting functionality (34%), or muting (33%).
- Two in three multiplayer gamers (67%) are likely to stop playing a game if they experience toxic behavior.
- Nearly three in four multiplayer gamers (74%) say they would not try a new game if it's known to have a toxic community.

FINDING 4

Developers are investing in solutions, but they have to balance competing priorities.

- While developers value cross-platform features like easy communication (38%) and shared progression (31%), **players prioritize fair matchmaking (29%) and toxicity-free environments (34%) without harassment (29%)**.
- Players list repetitive gameplay (38%), laggy experience (37%), and lack of players or friends (34%) as their top reasons for quitting games. This feedback highlights the need for developers to balance content quality, technical performance, and community engagement.
- Developers are leveraging third-party or hybrid toxicity detection tools and solutions that allow them to focus on creating engaging stories and mechanics.

FINDING 1

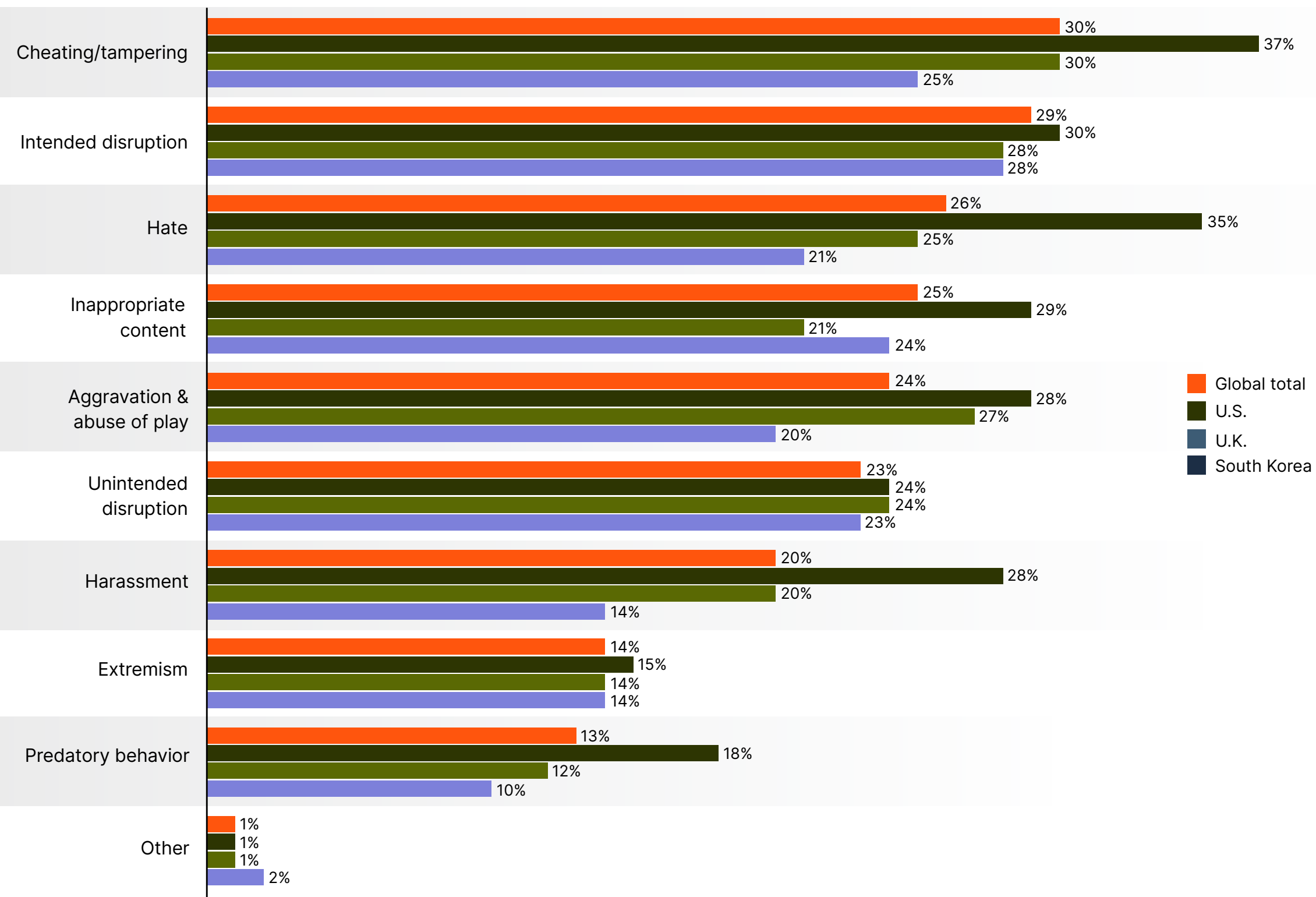
TOXIC BEHAVIOR IS ON THE RISE.

In 2023, **74% of players noted encounters with toxic behavior in games, up from 68% in 2021.** Regular exposure to **toxicity is reported by half of the surveyed players, with a marked increase in cheating and intended disruptions.** Developers have observed this rise more acutely than players, with 53% acknowledging it, compared to 32% of players.

DEFINING TOXIC BEHAVIOR

Opinions vary on the exact definition of toxic behavior, but most developers say they know it when they see it: verbal abuse, bullying, cheating, hate speech, threats, hacking, and more. Nearly half (45%) of devs find toxic behavior in multiplayer games common, and, over 12 months, most players (74%) have witnessed or experienced it.

CHART 1.1 Types of toxic behavior players have witnessed or experienced while playing multiplayer video games in the past 12 months



Players see cheating, intentional disruption, and hateful comments as the most prevalent types of toxic behavior. This points studios toward key intervention points to improve player experience as part of their toxicity strategy.



Country subgroup spotlight

The U.S. gaming community reports more frequent toxic experiences than South Korea and the U.K., particularly in cross-platform games. South Korean players say they tolerate these behaviors in specific game genres, which might account for their reported decrease in multiplayer game toxicity over the last year. Conversely, U.S. and U.K. players indicate a rising trend in toxic incidents, with the U.S. noting a significant increase. South Korean players generally report a decrease or no change in toxicity levels.

DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

What does toxicity look like in multiplayer games?

MALE, 36, SOUTH KOREA
 "People who continue to create and spread slander and abuse among the community."

FEMALE, 30, U.S.
 "Use of inappropriate language and slurs."

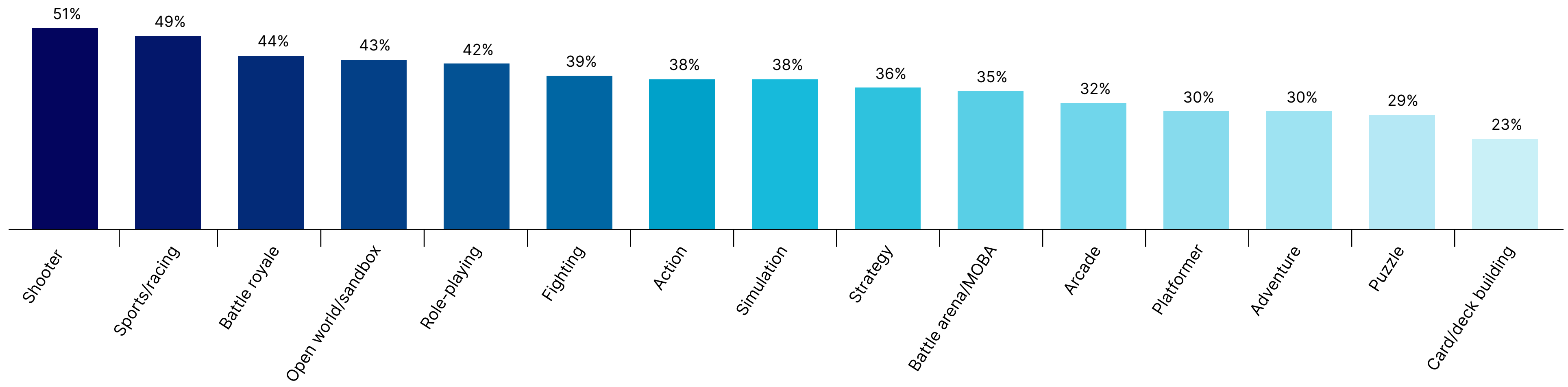
MALE, 42, U.K.
 "Targeting individual players on a regular basis in order to harass, break down or humiliate them."

FEMALE, 29, U.S.
 "Using a cheating device to influence other players."

MALE, 34, SOUTH KOREA
 "Deliberately disrupting the game."

TOXICITY ACROSS GENRES

CHART 1.2 Players who say they “always/almost always/often” witnessed or experiences toxicity in past 12 months
(Players globally)



Globally, first-person shooters, sports/racing, and battle royale are seen as the most toxic game genres in the U.K. and the U.S., while South Korean players point to role-playing, strategy, and Battle Arena/MOBA.

PLAYER PERSPECTIVE

What are the features that make multiplayer games enjoyable for you to play?

- MALE, 28, U.S.**
“Lots of players active and all are team players.”
- MALE, 42, U.K.**
“Quick matching, connecting with real players rather than bots.”
- FEMALE, 31, U.K.**
“A good player community that is not abusive to others.”
- MALE, 18, U.S.**
“Great connection no long waiting for matchmaking and players are friendly.”
- FEMALE, 29, U.S.**
“Play with people from all over.”

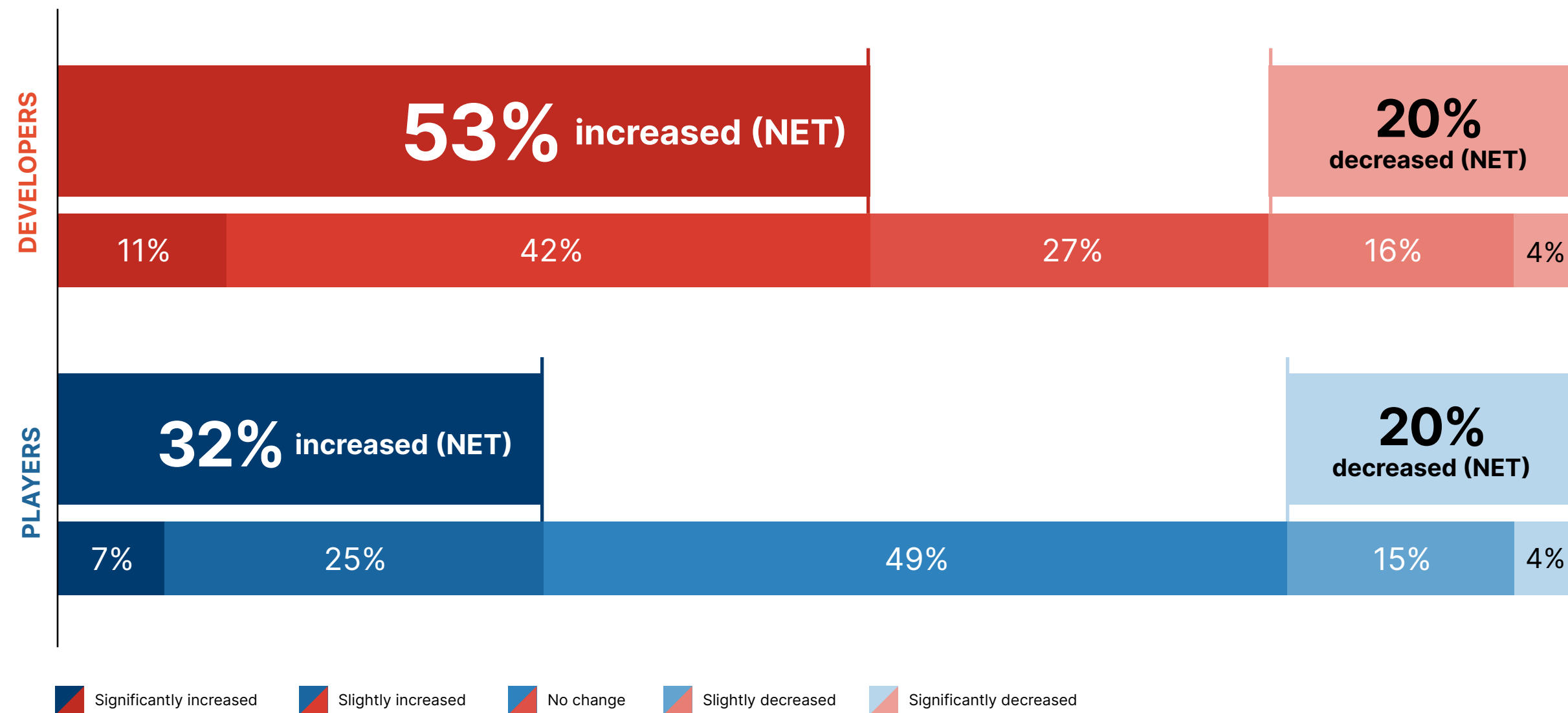
DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

What does a safe community look like in multiplayer games?

- MALE, 43, U.S.**
“Fair play and sportsmanship, reporting mechanism.”
- MALE, 42, U.K.**
“There are clear rules for players’ behavior in the game to prevent malicious behavior or inappropriate communication that harasses players.”
- FEMALE, 31, SOUTH KOREA**
“The community I create is all about allowing creators and players to communicate.”
- FEMALE, 29, U.S.**
“Designating responsible community moderators who can interact with players.”

DEVELOPERS AND PLAYERS SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

CHART 1.3 Change in toxic behavior in multiplayer games in the past 12 months



Developers don't describe toxic behavior as widespread, but they say that it appears to be on the rise. In the past 12 months, they are more likely to say they have noticed an increase in toxic behavior (53% of developers). In the same time period, **74% of players have witnessed or experienced toxic behavior while playing multiplayer video games**; 49% say the frequency hasn't changed much, and only 32% of players say they have noticed a rise.

This perception contradicts the data when we compare research from the last two toxicity reports. In 2023, there's an 8.8% increase in the overall percentage of players who have witnessed or experienced toxic behavior, up from 68% in 2021 to 74% in 2023.



AI has entered the chat

The rise of toxic behavior has created a growing need for ways to moderate more quickly and effectively. Technology is helping to address this challenge, enabling both proactive monitoring and player-initiated actions. By collecting evidence of toxicity and giving context about incidents, AI-powered tools are empowering players and human moderators to take action and make informed decisions.

One example of this technological advancement is Unity's Safe Voice, an AI-driven toxicity detection tool built for in-game voice communications. With data and visibility from Safe Voice, studios and moderators get the insights they need to take action and tackle toxicity in their games.



FINDING 2

NEARLY ALL PLAYERS ARE TAKING ACTION AGAINST TOXICITY.

96% of players are taking action against toxic behavior using methods like blocking and reporting, up from 66% in 2021. Notably, 67% said they might quit a toxic game, and 74% avoid games known for their hostile communities.

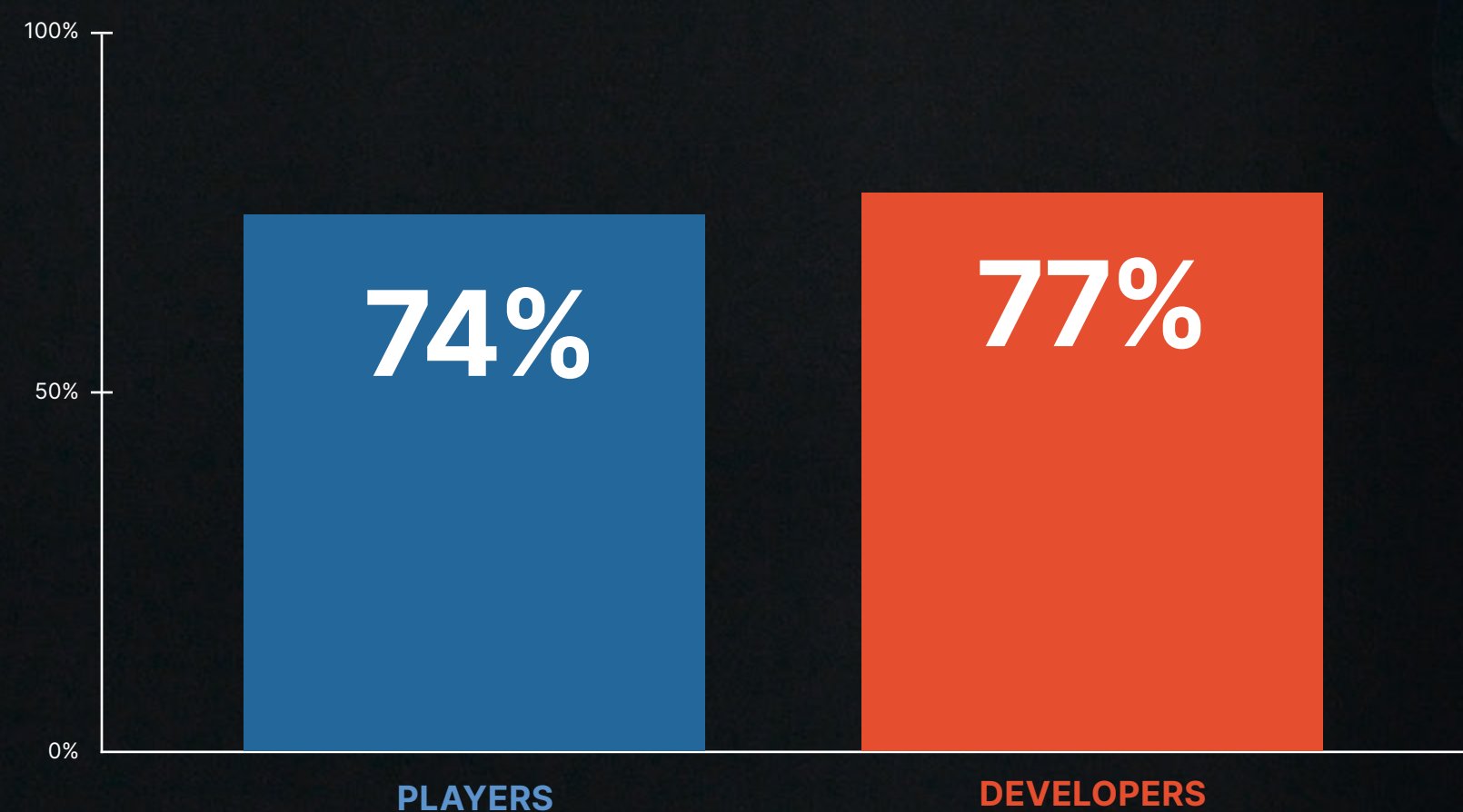
PLAYERS ARE FIGHTING BACK

CHART 2.1 Actions players take to counteract toxicity



In the battle against toxicity, multiplayer gamers are not passive bystanders. In the past year, nearly all players (96%) have responded to toxic behavior at some point, demonstrating their willingness to take action.

CHART 2.2 Agreement that toxicity is a deterrent in new games



Country subgroup spotlight

In the U.S., players are taking a hands-on approach to managing toxic encounters in games, often actively combating negative behavior through measures like muting or confronting an offender. A significant portion, 28%, are even willing to abandon a game entirely if the community harbors toxicity.

Moreover, many multiplayer gamers (67%) say they would consider abandoning a multiplayer game entirely if they encountered toxic behavior, mirroring the stance of U.S. players in the 2021 report (67%).

Both multiplayer gamers (74%) and developers (77%) mostly agree that a known toxic community in a new game is a significant player deterrent.



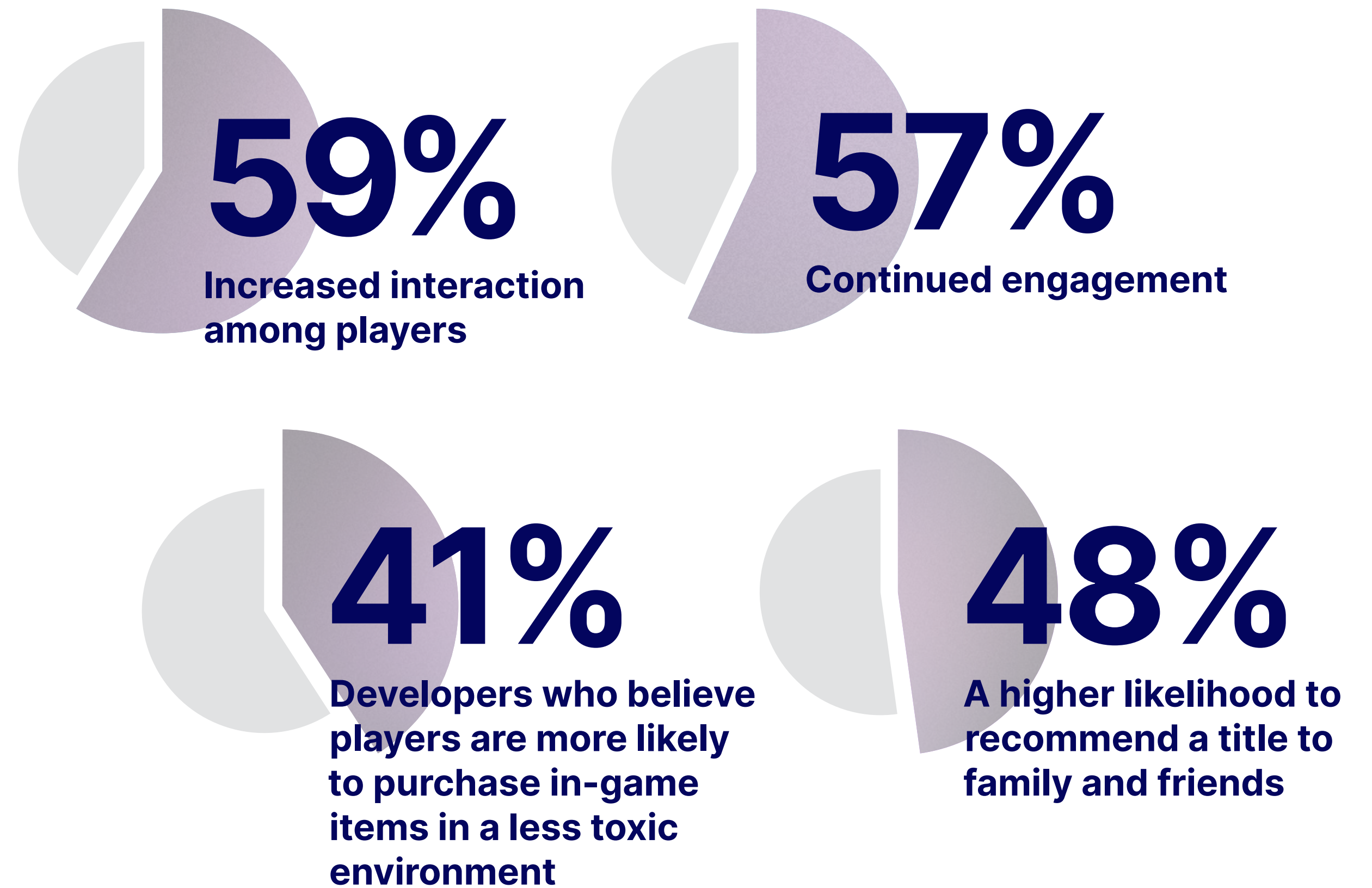
PLAYER PERSPECTIVE

 MALE, 20, U.S.

“Being able to provide feedback with a good developer response is one of the things that make the games fun.”

DEVELOPERS SEE THE BENEFITS OF TACKLING TOXICITY

Developers are largely optimistic about the potential to reduce in-game toxicity, with 98% believing that players will respond positively to changes. They claim that less-toxic games will translate to:



PLAYERS ARE WILLING TO BE RECORDED TO ADDRESS TOXICITY

Recording audio to fight toxicity in gaming is catching on as an idea, and **68% of players are willing to be recorded if it's to fight toxicity**. Recording comes with the perks of holding players accountable and having solid proof of behavior.

CHART 2.3 Players willingness to be recorded to tackle in-game toxicity

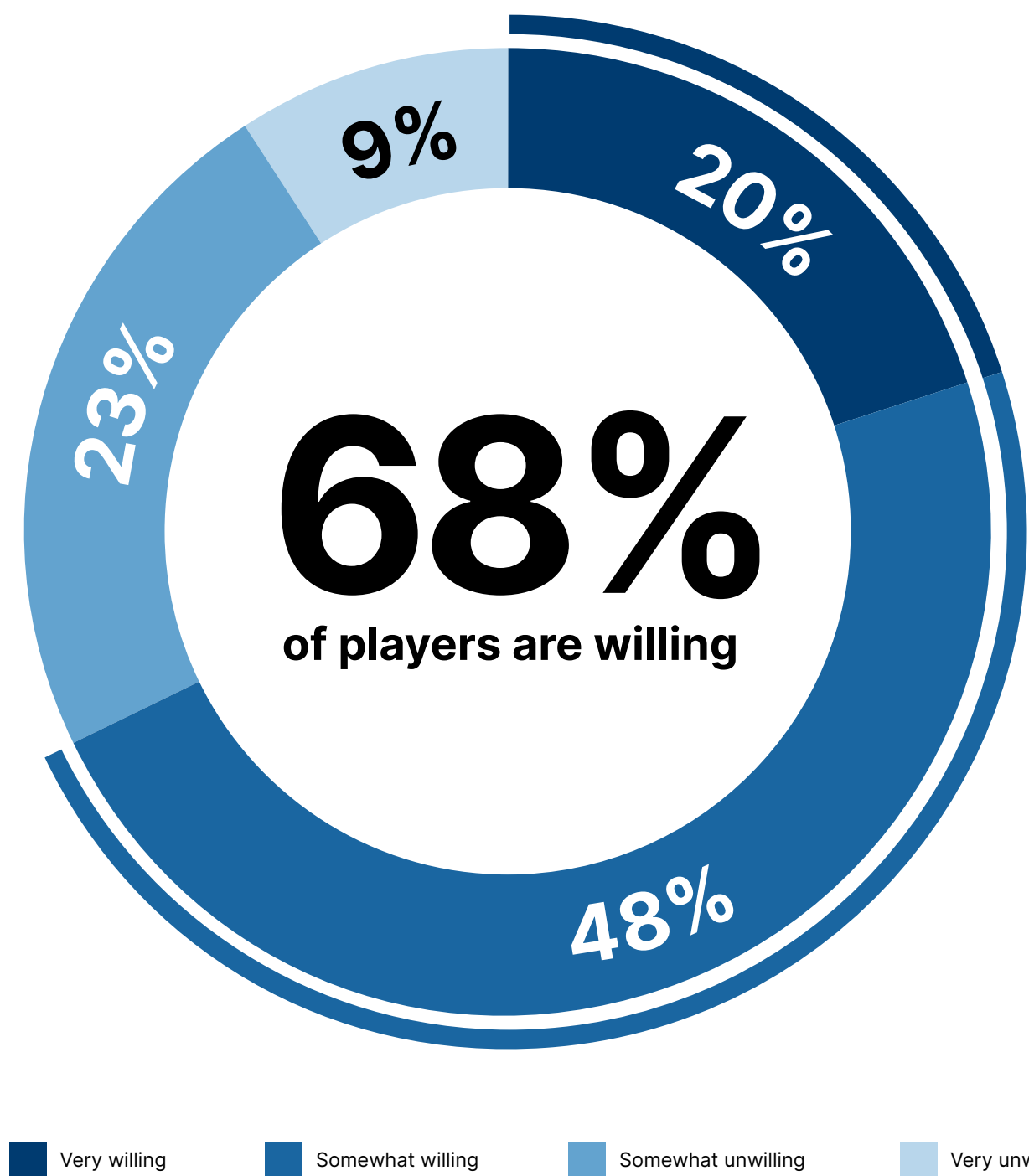
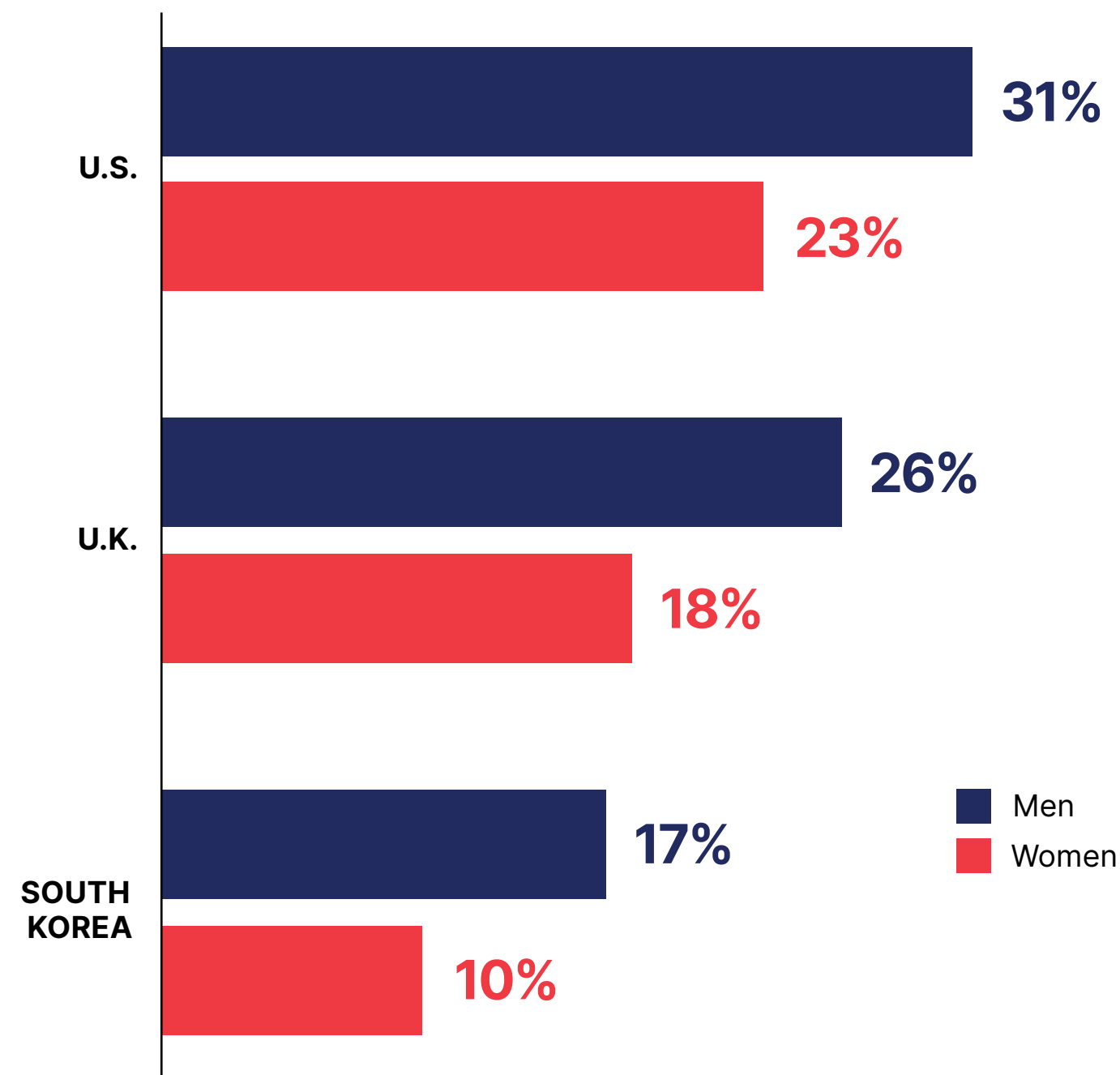


CHART 2.4

Willingness to be recorded by gender



A significant portion of players (89%) recognize the benefits of being recorded, with both players (68%) and developers (69%) agreeing on its potential to reduce toxicity. These benefits include encouraging players to behave well (50%), helping moderators to make fair decisions (45%), and gathering evidence to counter false reports (42%).

However, the same proportion of players (89%) have concerns about being recorded. They want to be sure that their information won't be misused (43%) or sold (31%), that it's safe from data leaks (34%), and that it won't be used to target them for purposes beyond moderation (31%).

Most developers (69%) believe that players are fine with being recorded, but only to reduce toxicity. To get players on board, they may need to promise that the recordings will only be used in this way, a belief held by 87% of developers.



Country subgroup spotlight

The data reveals regional differences in players' willingness to be recorded for toxicity management. Notably, U.S. (27%) and U.K. (23%) players are more inclined toward recording as a strategy than players in South Korea (13%).

In both the U.S. and the U.K., male players display a greater willingness, with 31% and 26%, respectively (compared to 23% and 18% of female players). Additionally, millennials in these regions, at 32%, exhibit a more favorable attitude than Gen Z at 19%.

Players who spend over 40 hours monthly gaming are more receptive to recording, with 36% in the U.S., 30% in the U.K., and 20% in South Korea, compared to 21%, 17%, and 12%, respectively, among those who game less than 10 hours.

FINDING 3

PLAYERS THINK DEVELOPERS AND MODERATORS SHOULD MANAGE GAME SAFETY.

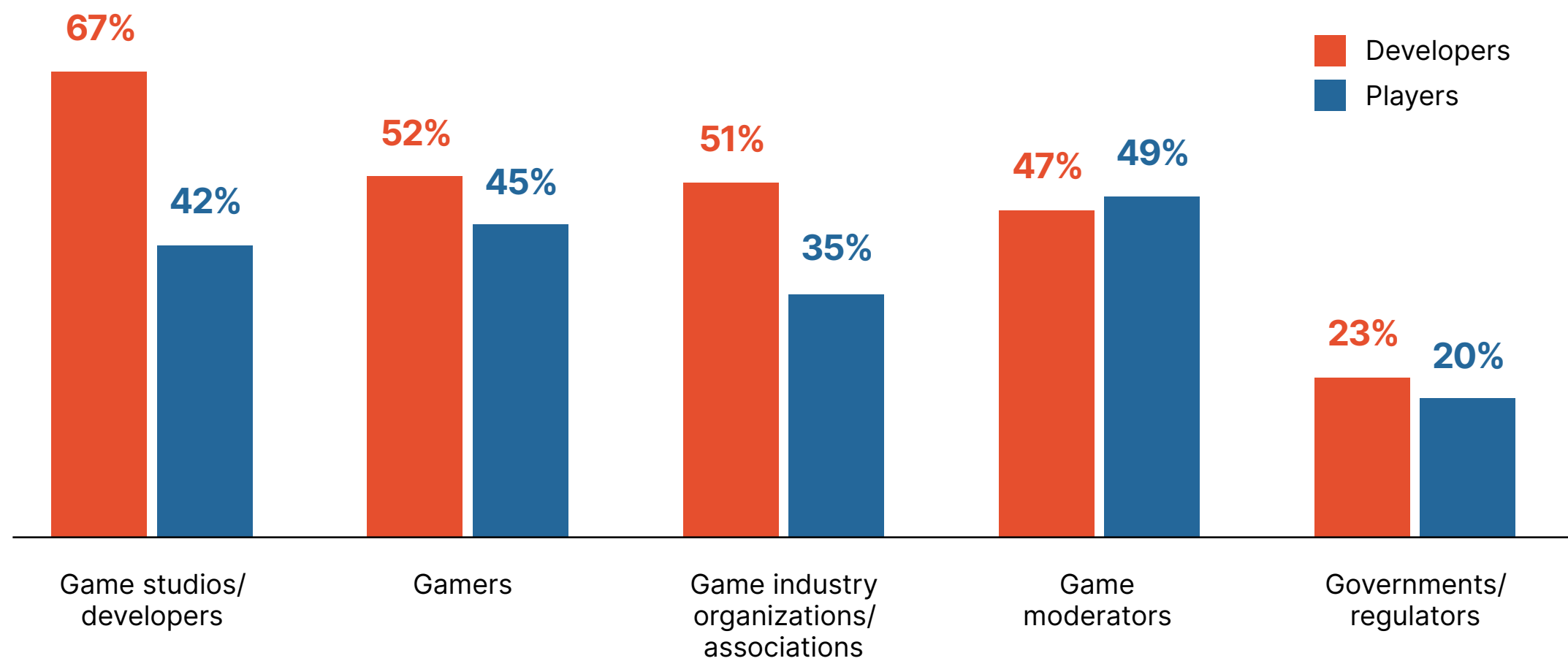
Players largely view developers and moderators as the custodians of game safety, holding 49% and 42% of the responsibility respectively. These groups also attribute 45% of the duty to themselves. The sentiment that developers should prioritize safety is growing: In 2023, **81% of people point to developers' safety responsibilities, up from 77% in 2021.**

Players view moderators and developers as being primarily responsible for game safety.

Developers and players see game safety as a shared responsibility, and they agree that developers, players, and the broader industry all have a role to play in building safe game environments. Here are some of the differing perspectives that emerged from the research.

CHART 3

Who should be primarily responsible for making games safe and inclusive for players





Country subgroup spotlight

While toxicity is reportedly more prevalent in the U.S., a majority of American players (51%) believe that the responsibility to manage it lies with the players themselves. This sentiment is slightly more prominent compared to players in the U.K. and South Korea, who share this view at 42% and 43%, respectively. U.K. players notably lean towards expecting intervention from external entities such as governments or regulators (25%), a trend that's not as strong in the U.S. (19%) and South Korea (17%).

Additionally, both the U.K. and U.S. players advocate for the involvement of industry organizations to address this issue, standing at 45% and 42% respectively, as opposed to a lesser emphasis on this in South Korea, at 23%.

PLAYER AND DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGING TOXICITY

Player view

81% of multiplayer gamers agree that protecting players from toxic behavior should be a priority for game developers, compared to 77% of U.S. gamers in 2021.

Players appear to understand that creating safe environments in games requires collaboration, and they see themselves as key contributors. However, they expect studios and moderators to lead the charge with solutions like muting, loss of in-game items, suspension, manual reporting, and recordings, especially in the U.S.

Studio view

Developers generally acknowledge their role in creating safe gaming environments. They recognize the importance of implementing measures to reduce toxicity, such as reporting functions, suspensions, and in extreme cases, potentially eliminating, or improving features like matchmaking and text or voice chatting. While 89% of developers say more solutions are necessary to reduce toxicity, 56% admit that protecting players from toxic behavior is not a top priority.

A VIEW ACROSS THE GAMING INDUSTRY

Groups like the Fair Play Alliance, a global coalition of gaming professionals, are doing good work in the gaming trust and safety space by encouraging collaboration across the industry. They provide a forum for gaming professionals and companies to develop and share best practices. Fair Play Alliance is working to build a world where games are free of harassment, discrimination, and abuse so players can express themselves through play.

The gaming industry must empower creators with solutions to tame disruptive behaviors and promote positive and engaging communities within games. Addressing toxicity requires a collaborative approach that involves tech companies, studios, publishers, platforms, players, and other stakeholders. Understanding why and how toxic attitudes develop is crucial for the continued growth and success of online gaming.

DEVELOPERS HAVE ONLY JUST BEGUN TO FIGHT TOXICITY

Players and developers agree that toxic behavior can be addressed with both proactive (and reactive) steps. Both suggest that players should take action by reporting toxic behavior.

Developers are implementing protections against toxic behavior, but 89% of them agree that more needs to be done.

Reporting and suspension features are seen as the most efficient ways to combat toxicity.

54% of developers have reporting features in their games, and 51% have included the ability to suspend players.

UNITY PERSPECTIVE



GLADYS KWOK
PRODUCT MANAGER FOR MATCHMAKER

“Developers can counter player toxicity by instituting a reporting system that assigns reputation scores based on in-game actions. A well-considered matchmaking implementation using reputation scores can foster harmonious player groupings and reduce toxicity.

One example is the Unity Gaming Services Matchmaker, which offers users the ability to incorporate personalized data, such as player reputation scores, into their matchmaking requests. This enables developers to effectively tackle the challenges posed by bad actors in gameplay.”

FINDING 4

DEVELOPERS ARE INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS BUT MUST BALANCE PRIORITIES.

96% of developers agree that effective tools exist to combat toxic behavior in multiplayer games, but only 52% prioritize investing in this technology. Developers must balance toxicity with player experience, focusing on features like cross-play, performance, and fresh content.



STUDIOS HAVE COMPETING PRIORITIES

When asked to choose the top three factors that would cause them to stop playing a game, players report repetitive or dull gameplay (38%), a laggy experience (37%), and a lack of players or friends (34%).

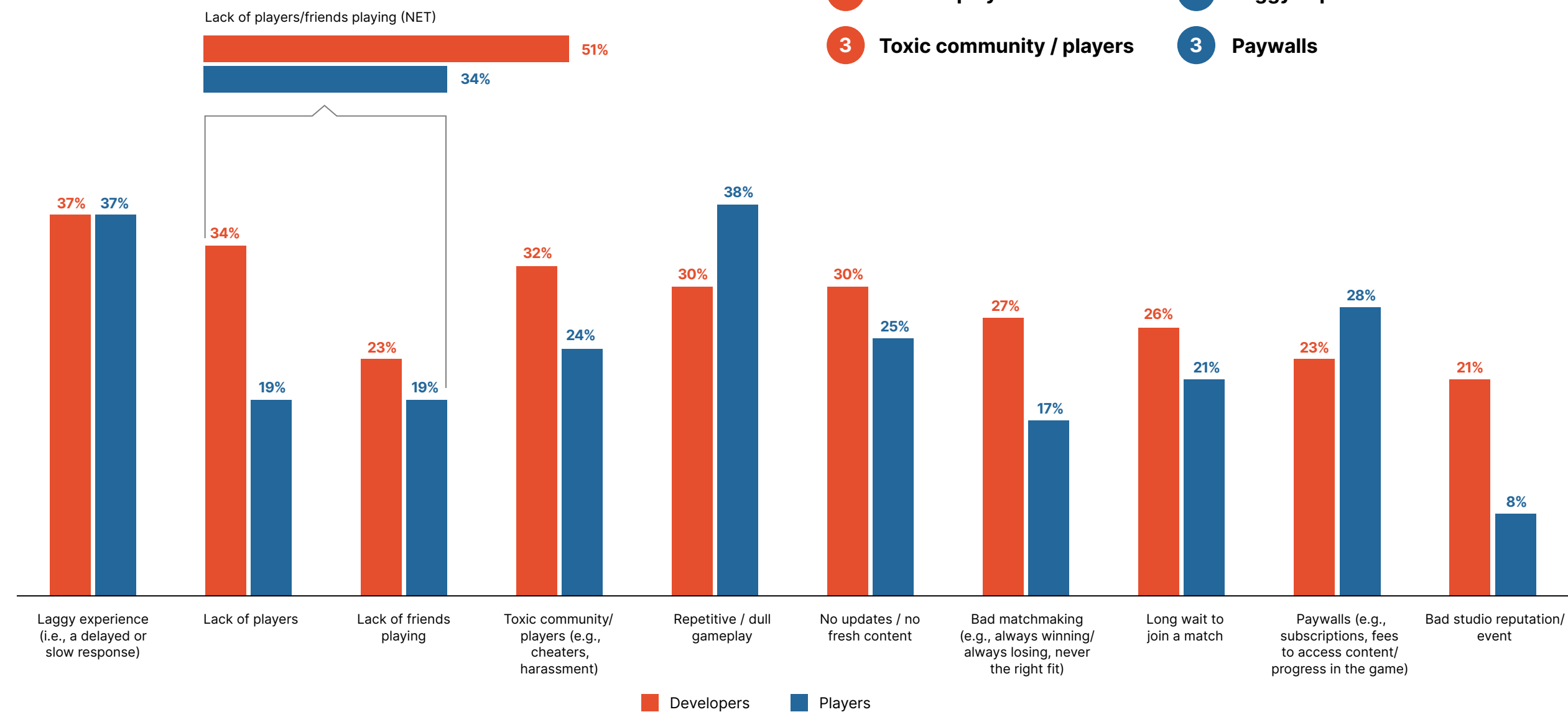
CHART 4.1 Why players stop playing a game
Respondents selected their top three responses

DEVELOPERS:

- 1 Laggy experience
- 2 Lack of players
- 3 Toxic community / players

PLAYERS:

- 1 Repetitive / dull gameplay
- 2 Laggy experience
- 3 Paywalls



Developers recognize that the primary reason a player might quit a multiplayer game is not having other players or friends present (51%). They align with players in identifying a laggy experience (37%) as a deterrent but perceive a toxic community as a more serious issue that could potentially lead to quitting a game (32%, compared to 24% for players).

Just over half of developers surveyed (52%) say investing in technology to better manage the community is one of their studio's top priorities this year. Nearly all developers (96%) agree that there are effective tools available to curb toxic behavior in multiplayer games. These mainly include options for players to report bad behavior (53%) and the suspension of offending players (51%), which are also the most common features implemented by studios (54% and 47%, respectively).

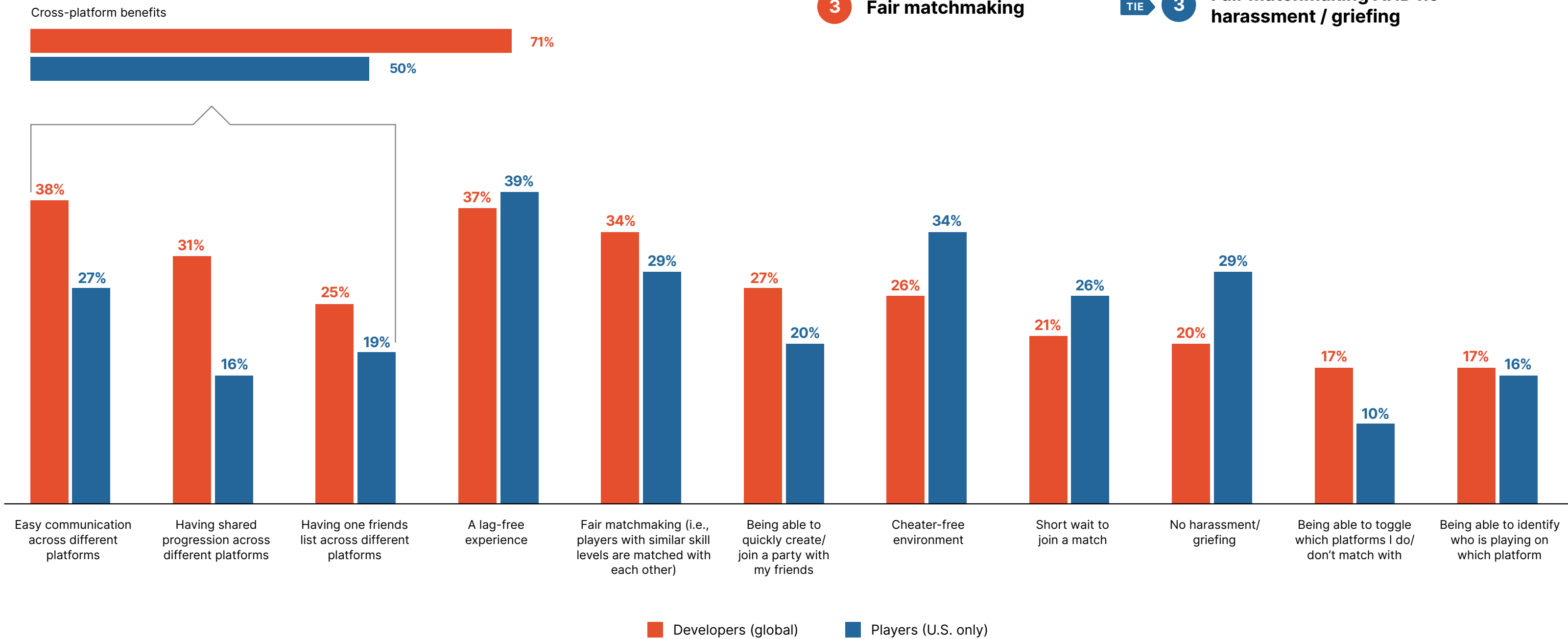


Country subgroup spotlight

U.S. players tend to want more checks and balances in place. Many recommendations are generally felt more strongly in the United States than in other countries, perhaps due to the fact that toxic behavior in the U.S. is seen as more common and growing.

Overall, U.S. players are more likely than their peers to want muting, loss of in-game cosmetic items, and suspensions as penalties for toxicity, and they're more likely to request additional punishments like ejection (than in the U.K.). They're also more inclined to suggest manual reporting and recordings than U.K. players – and they're more likely to accept asking for age verification, default moderation, and human moderation than South Korean players.

CHART 4.2 Features for an enjoyable multiplayer experience
 Respondents selected their top three responses



DEVELOPERS:

- 1 Easy communication across different platforms
- 2 A lag-free experience
- 3 Fair matchmaking

PLAYERS:

- 1 A lag-free experience
- 2 Cheater-free environment
- TIE 3 Fair matchmaking AND no harassment / griefing

Players and devs agree on features, but players zero in on toxicity


According to developers globally, having cross-platform features like easy communication (38%), shared progression (31%), and a singular friends list (25%) help to create an enjoyable multiplayer experience. Nearly two in five developers globally (37%) and American players* (39%) also report a lag-free experience as one of the most valuable features.

Players are mostly aligned with developers on the features that matter, but they place more importance on fair, toxicity-free environments that are free of cheaters (34%), have fair matchmaking (29%), and have no harassment/griefing (29%).


Although enabling cross-platform play can help to reach a wider market, it also comes with challenges. U.S. players* report that they expect to encounter negative issues when playing cross-platform games, specifically a higher chance of toxic behavior (34%) or playing against cheaters (29%). U.S. players* also expect some benefits, including a wider player base (37%), shorter wait times to join a match (29%), and the ability to continue progress across platforms (28%). Only 17% of U.S. players say their expectations aren't different when playing a cross-platform game, which is on par with 2022 (19%).

PLAYER PERSPECTIVE

The need for developers to balance communities, performance and fun

 MALE, 46, SOUTH KOREA

“Appropriate level of difficulty, good balance between characters, server stability, diverse maps, and game modes.”

 MALE, 39, SOUTH KOREA

“You can play happily when there are no bugs and the difficulty level of the game continues smoothly.”

 FEMALE, 23, U.S.

“Populated servers, fast matchmaking, fun gameplay with friends, fun meeting players in-game.”

DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

What technology do you wish was available to use in multiplayer games?

 SOUTH KOREAN DEVELOPER

“Today, where the development of games is getting faster and faster, I hope to add artificial intelligence to future multiplayer games, so that we can not only give more intelligence in terms of behavior to our in-game avatars, but also make real-time measurements and improvements to the in-game environment.”

 U.S. DEVELOPER

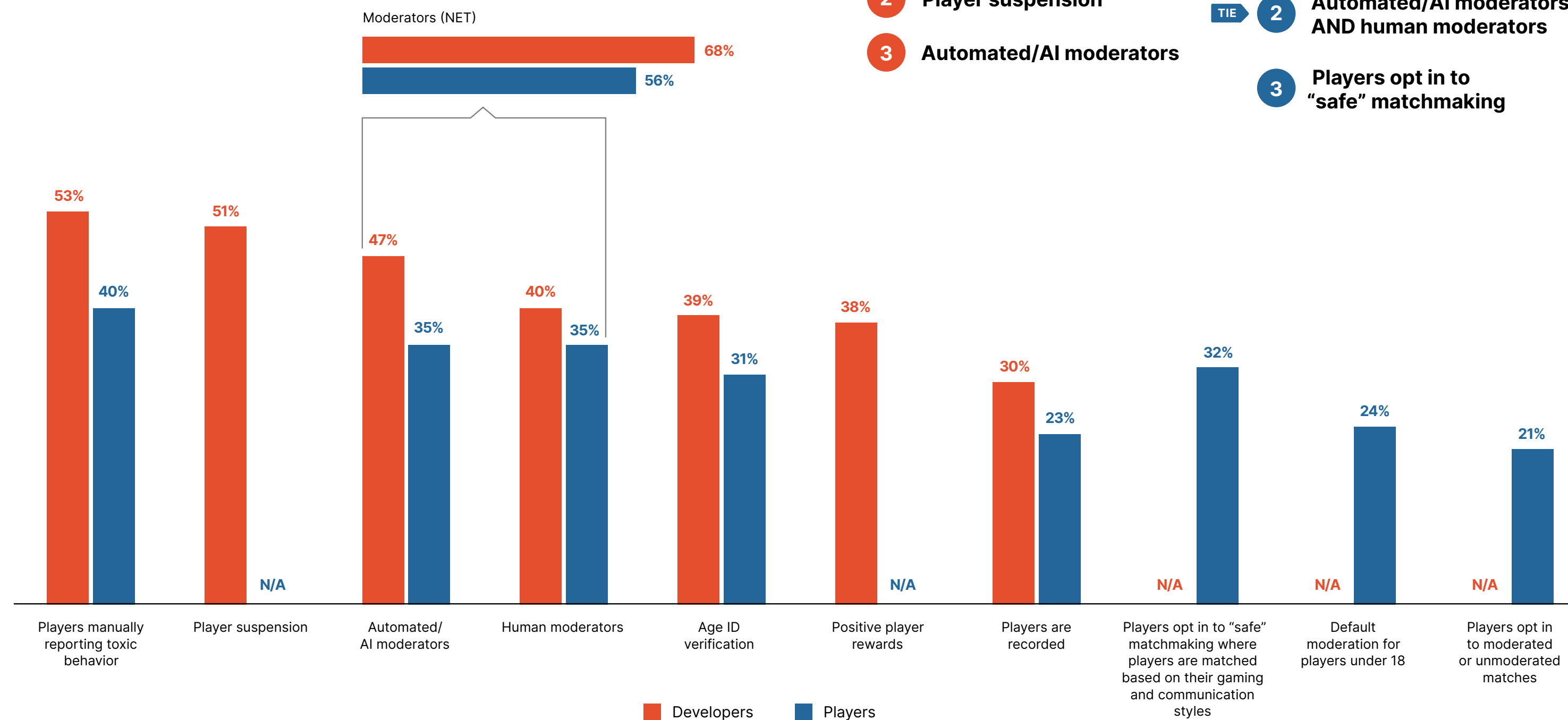
“I wish there were ways to make it easier to ban players that cause issues in multiplayer games.”

 U.S. DEVELOPER

“Advanced AI-based tools for analyzing player behavior and identifying toxic or disruptive players could assist in maintaining a positive and enjoyable gaming environment for everyone.”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT TOXICITY

CHART 4.3 Effectiveness of tactics for combating toxic behavior in multiplayer games
 Respondents selected their top three responses



DEVELOPERS:

- 1 Players manually reporting toxic behavior
- 2 Player suspension
- 3 Automated/AI moderators

PLAYERS:

- 1 Players manually reporting toxic behavior
- TIE** 2 Automated/AI moderators AND human moderators
- 3 Players opt in to "safe" matchmaking

Players agree (93%) that a few quick fixes should be put in place to monitor or curb toxic behavior. Players' top solution is having moderators (56%), but other suggestions include having players opt in (45%) or asking players to manually report toxic behavior (40%).

Nearly all players (94%) say that toxic behavior should be punished, and they especially favor having players who exhibit toxic behavior being temporarily ejected from games (42%), suspended for a period

of time (42%), or banned completely (43%). Nearly eight in 10 multiplayer players (79%) also suggest rewarding positive behavior as an effective way to combat toxicity in multiplayer games.

→ Put players at the center of your toxicity strategy

96% of players are already taking action against toxicity on their own, so actively involving players in safety initiatives can cultivate a culture of mutual accountability. Talk to your community to understand their needs and give them tools to combat toxicity.

→ Leverage new technology

Technology has emerged as a powerful aid in the fight against disruptive and toxic behavior in games. There are now several toxicity detection and moderation tools available to studios, including [Safe Voice](#) and [Moderation](#) from Unity.

→ Encourage positive behavior

While much of the focus on toxicity revolves around penalties and prevention, encouraging positive behavior is equally vital to creating a healthy gaming environment. Rewarding good behavior can foster a more positive community and deter toxicity.

Developers can implement systems that recognize and reward positive interactions within the game, such as special badges, in-game currency, or other incentives.

→ Collaborate across the industry

Toxicity in gaming is a complex issue that requires a united front between studios, players and industry groups. By sharing knowledge, crafting common guidelines, and researching the roots of toxic behavior, we can build a deeper understanding and more effectively tackle this issue.

→ Get involved:
Connect with [Fair Play Alliance](#)

CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Toxicity in multiplayer gaming is a growing concern that impacts players, developers, and the broader gaming community. Developers have a critical role to play in addressing this issue, but fostering safer gaming spaces requires a multifaceted approach. From understanding the unique dynamics in different countries to exploring innovative toxicity detection and moderation tools, the path to a toxic-free gaming environment is complex but achievable.

The recommendations provided in this report offer a roadmap for developers to navigate this challenging landscape, backed by data to support informed decision making. By prioritizing player safety, encouraging positive behavior, collaborating with industry stakeholders, and staying attuned to the evolving nature of toxic behavior, developers can create engaging and inclusive gaming experiences that resonate with players around the globe.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The gamer survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Unity Technologies from July 21–31, 2023, among 2,522 gamers in the United States (n=1,046), United Kingdom (n=633), and South Korea (n=843). Gamers (or Players) were defined as adults 18+ who play video games, electronic games, or mobile games. Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

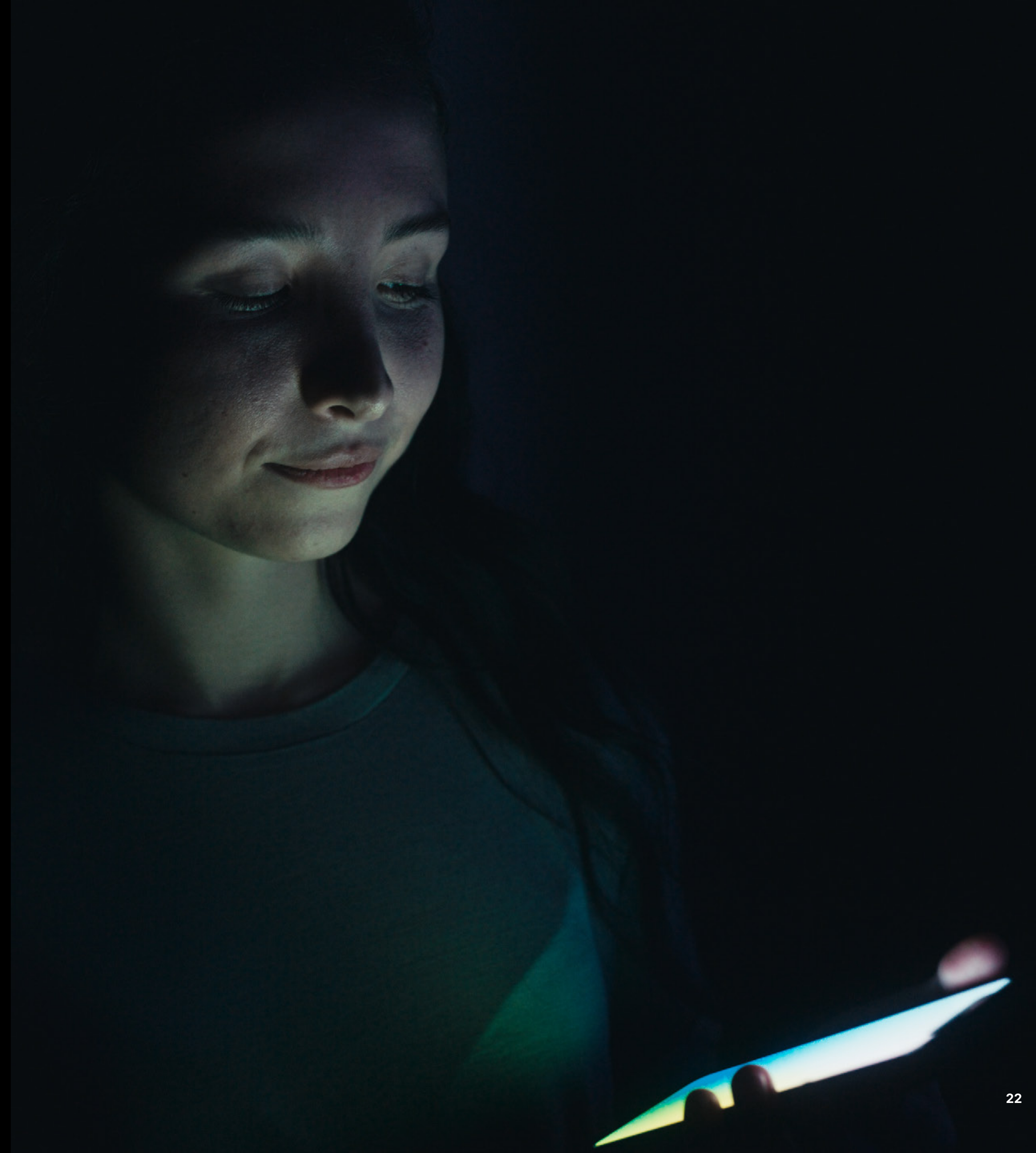
The developer survey was conducted online in the United States, United Kingdom, and South Korea from July 21–August 9, 2023 among 407 developers (202 in the U.S., 101 in the U.K., and 104 in South Korea). Developers were defined as adults 18+ who are employed as a software/game engineer, developer, or designer and are involved in managing/overseeing, researching, marketing, designing, and/or developing games). Data for the U.S. developer sample are weighted where necessary by company size, based on number of employees, to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Data for the U.K. and South Korea were not weighted and are therefore only representative of the individuals who completed the survey. A post-weight was applied to ensure equal weight of each country in the global total.

Respondents for both surveys were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the gamer sample data is accurate to within ± 2.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level and the developer sample data is accurate to within ± 5.4 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Report notes

*Certain questions were only asked to U.S. multiplayer gamers. Findings using that U.S.-only gamer data have an asterisk added at the end to separate them from country spotlights.



ABOUT UNITY

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