

HUMAN SECURITY REPORT 2013

THE DECLINE IN GLOBAL VIOLENCE:
EVIDENCE, EXPLANATION, AND CONTESTATION



HUMAN SECURITY REPORT PROJECT
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, CANADA

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OVERVIEW ¹

THE DECLINE IN GLOBAL VIOLENCE: EVIDENCE, EXPLANATION, AND CONTESTATION

During the past decade, an increasing number of studies have made the case that levels of violence around the world have declined.² Few have made much impact outside the research community—Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* is a major exception.

Published in 2011, *Better Angels*’ central argument—one made over some 700 densely argued pages of text, supported by 70 pages of footnotes—is that there has been an extraordinary but little-recognized, long-term worldwide reduction in all forms of violence—one that stretches back at least to 10,000 BCE.

Better Angels has received high praise for its extraordinary scope, its originality, and the breadth and depth of its scholarship. It is engagingly written, powerfully argued, and its claims are supported by a mass of statistical evidence.

It has also generated considerable skepticism and in some cases outright hostility.

Part I of this *Report* discusses the central theses of *Better Angels* and examines the major claims of its critics. Part II presents updated statistics on armed conflicts around the world since the end of World War II, plus post–Cold War trends in assaults on civilians and conflicts that do not involve governments.

The Long-Term Decline in Violence

The decline in the violence that human beings perpetrate against each other has taken place in different periods in different parts of the world and there have been many reversals.

But the overall trend, Pinker argues, has clearly been downward—less warfare, fewer murders, dramatic reductions in torture and other cruel and inhumane practices, and the virtual eradication of slavery.

Better Angels is by far the most ambitious of the studies of trends in global violence that have appeared in the new millennium—including the *Human Security Reports* published in 2005 and 2011. Most of these studies have reported on reductions in the level of *political* violence—notably wars and terrorism—and have focused on the post–World War II world. The scope of Pinker’s study is much broader. Its historical sweep traverses some 12-plus millennia. It examines long-term declines in homicides as well as warfare, and a wide variety of forms of violence that are not necessarily lethal—slavery, rape and torture, and even cruelty to animals.

In explaining these remarkable changes, Pinker identifies five key trends. First is the “Pacification Process”—the uneven transitions over thousands of years from anarchic hunter-gatherer, horticultural, and other early human societies to the first agricultural civilizations and then nation-states. These transitions have been associated with dramatic decreases in death rates from both war and homicides.

Second, from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century came the “Civilizing Process” that accompanied the growth and consolidation of the nation-state system in Europe. During this period, Europe became more urban, more cosmopolitan, commercial, and secular. Often highly repressive, the Civilizing Process was associated with declines in homicide rates that ranged from tenfold to more than fiftyfold.

Third, the “Humanitarian Revolution” that started in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was associated with the decline and eventual abolition of slavery, with the slow elimination of judicial and other forms of torture and a long-term reduction in all manner of other cruel and inhumane practices.

Fourth, the “Long Peace” that followed the end of World War II saw the disappearance of great-power wars and the dramatic reduction in the number and deadliness of other international conflicts. This change came about in part because industrial-strength warfare had become so destructive to all parties that it no longer served any rational purpose.

The popular revulsion generated by the mass slaughters of World War II had also strengthened the emergent norm that proscribed the resort to war except in self-defence or with the imprimatur of the UN (United Nations) Security Council. By the early 1970s, wars of liberation from colonial rule were mostly over and the idea of new colonial conquests had become simply unthinkable.

Finally came what Pinker calls the “New Peace” of the post–Cold War period. From the early 1990s, the number of conflicts within states declined substantially after increasing for some four decades.

The end of the Cold War not only removed a significant source of conflict from the international system, it also led to the emergence of a new form of global security governance.

Starting in the early 1990s, the much-criticized UN spearheaded a massive upsurge of international activism directed towards preventing wars, stopping those that could not be prevented, and preventing those that had stopped from reigniting. Its key stakeholders have been international agencies, donor governments—and those of war-affected states—plus huge numbers of NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

In its current stage of development, this continually expanding system of global security governance remains inchoate, disputatious, inefficient, and prone to tragic mistakes. But as previous *Human Security Reports* have argued, the evidence suggests that it has also been remarkably effective in driving down the number and deadliness of armed conflicts.

The expanding system of global security governance remains inchoate, disputatious, inefficient, and prone to tragic mistakes.

“Better Angels” and “Inner Demons”

Steven Pinker is an experimental psychologist and cognitive scientist, so it is not surprising that he devotes an entire section of *Better Angels* to the psychological mechanisms that drive violence. Human beings, he argues, are neither innately good nor evil, but circumstance can orient them either towards confrontation and violence or towards cooperation and peace. The drivers of violence—predation, dominance, revenge, sadism, and ideology—are the “inner demons” of human nature. The “better angels of our nature”—the faculties that steer individuals away from violence—include empathy, self-control, moral sense, and reason. (The references to the “inner demons” and “better angels” of human nature come from US President Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address delivered in 1861.)

Better Angels can be understood in part as an analysis of how long-term changes in culture and material circumstance have, over time, permitted the better angels of human nature to prevail over its inner demons.

Contested Claims

Most reviews of *Better Angels* have been highly positive, though some otherwise sympathetic reviewers have challenged particular claims, especially those regarding the deadliness of major episodes of violence. But some critiques have been consistently negative and a few have been deeply hostile.

The focus of the most sustained criticism has been Pinker’s central claim—that there has been a millennia-long decline in all forms of violence.

Claims that the number of interstate wars has decreased dramatically since the 1950s, and that civil war numbers have declined since the end of the Cold War, are now uncontroversial within the mainstream conflict research community, though they still occasion surprise and sometimes skepticism among non-specialists. The data on violence

going back 10,000-plus years are far less robust and it is here that Pinker's analysis is most audacious—daring to tread where few scholars have gone before and generating some intense criticism in so doing.

Better Angels is criticized for underestimating the violence of today and for overestimating that of the distant past.

A smaller number of critics accept that there have been significant reductions in violence over the centuries but challenge the complex multi-level arguments Pinker advances to explain them. We examine these critiques in Chapter 1.

Those who reject the evidence that is marshalled in *Better Angels* fall into two broad camps. Against Pinker, the majority affirm the conventional wisdom that World War II was, in fact, the deadliest-ever conflict and that the twentieth century was the most violent in history. A smaller number of critics—mostly anthropologists—argue that the hunter-gatherer and other societies that preceded the formation of states were far *less* violent than Pinker claims.

Better Angels, in other words, is under attack, both for underestimating the violence of the recent past and for overestimating that of the distant past. Thus, to sustain his thesis that there has been a millennia-long decline in violence, Pinker has to do two things. First, he has to argue that World War II was not the bloodiest conflict in world history. Second, he has to show that the anarchic hunter-gatherer and other non-state groups that made up the earliest human societies had far higher rates of lethal violence than the state-based societies that succeeded them.

Was World War II the Deadliest War in History?

One reason that the core thesis of *Better Angels* has invited so much surprise—and skepticism—is that, in terms of the sheer numbers of people killed, there is little doubt that World War II's death toll was greater than any other war in the entire span of human history. This uncontested fact raises an obvious question: if the deadliest-ever war took place in living memory, how is it possible to claim, as Pinker does, that we are likely living in the least violent era in human history?

Pinker does not dispute the fact that World War II almost certainly killed more people than any other war in history. But he argues that the most appropriate metric for estimating the deadliness of wars is not the absolute number of fatalities but the number of war deaths *relative to the size of the population*. From this perspective, a conflict that kills 10,000 people in a society with a population of 100,000 is 10 times deadlier than one that kills 10,000 people in a society of a million people even though the numbers killed are identical.

While World War II certainly killed far more people than did earlier episodes of mass killing, the global population was far larger in the twentieth century than in earlier centuries, making World War II's bloodletting *relatively* much less deadly than the absolute numbers

suggest. Indeed, Pinker maintains that *relative to the world's population*, World War II is only the ninth-deadliest episode of sustained violence in human history.

But this is not the metric most commonly used for determining the deadliness of periods of violence. The standard measure is deaths per 100,000 of the population *per year*.

Because the huge number of World War II deaths occurred within a very short period, the annual *rate* of killing was far greater than in earlier episodes of mass violence, most of which occurred over far longer time periods. Indeed, using the standard metric of violent deaths per 100,000 of the population per year, World War II becomes the deadliest war in more than 1,000 years.

However, if we take a longer time horizon and turn to yet another metric, the picture changes again. The quantitative data that Pinker draws on for deaths caused by violent conflict in pre-historic and other early non-state societies indicate that, on average, warfare accounted for about 15 percent of fatalities from all causes. This is an astonishingly high rate—dramatically greater than the percentage of deaths caused by warfare in modern Europe—even in the two deadliest centuries of the most recent half millennium. Thus, wars in seventeenth-century Europe were responsible for some 2 percent of deaths from all causes; in the twentieth century, the figure was 3 percent—one-fifth the average rate of the early hunter-gatherer societies. Focusing on the longer period is important because, as Pinker makes it clear, his thesis is about a global decline in violence that covers the period from pre-history to the present day—not simply Europe since the Middle Ages.

How Violent Were Early Human Societies?

To sustain his declinist argument, Pinker has to argue not only that the twentieth century was relatively much less deadly than the conventional wisdom suggests but also that the human societies that existed millennia ago were far more violent than widely understood. This latter claim has come under fierce attack from anthropologists who reject the quantitative data—much of it archaeological—on which Pinker draws. The

critics argue that the data from these periods are sometimes wrong, and that they are too few and fragmentary to have confidence that they are representative of levels of violence in all non-state societies.

In a new study released by Oxford University Press in 2013, editor and leading Pinker critic Douglas Fry maintains that there is virtually no evidence that the earliest nomadic societies, those existing *prior* to 10,000 BCE, were warlike. Pinker's declinist thesis fails, Fry argues, because it ignores the fact that the earliest human societies were extraordinarily peaceful.

In terms of the sheer numbers of people killed World War II's death toll was greater than any other war in the entire span of human history.

However, the data from this very early period are even scarcer and more fragmented than those of more recent millennia. And, of course, the absence of evidence for high-fatality warfare in this period is not the same as evidence for the absence of such violence.

Moreover, even if Fry's argument about the peacefulness of the very earliest human societies is accepted, it is far from clear how this undermines Pinker's thesis. The focus of *Better Angels* is predominantly on the period *after* 10,000 BCE, and Fry agrees both with Pinker's contention that violence in this latter period decreased and that, over time, the spread and consolidation of state power had a pacifying effect on inter-group violence.

Lethal Violence Is about More Than War Deaths

The controversies over which periods of warfare in human history are the deadliest are unlikely to be resolved any time soon. However, even if we had long-term war-death data that *were* comprehensive and reliable, this in itself would not be sufficient to either prove or disprove Pinker's thesis. *Better Angels* is not just about millennia-long trends in warfare but all forms of violence, not least homicides. This is pertinent because as the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence has demonstrated, warfare is responsible for less than one in 10 violent deaths in today's world—the large majority result from homicides.

As Chapter 1 points out, the available data from Western Europe reveal a dramatic decline in homicide rates over the past 700-odd years. Pinker draws on a range of quantitative studies indicating that the average homicide rate across the region fell from well over 50 per 100,000 per year in the fourteenth century to little over one per 100,000 in the twentieth century, a fiftyfold decline. Over the same period, the limited data cited in *Better Angels* indicate that deaths per 100,000 of the population per year from great-power wars increased as states consolidated, grew larger, and the killing power of their armies expanded.

We cannot, however, assume that war death rates *overall* necessarily increased in this period because it is likely that death tolls from civil wars decreased as state control expanded and consolidated, while death tolls from great-power wars became more deadly. It is also possible that any net increase in overall war death rates was more than offset by the steep decrease in average homicide rates over the same period.

While focusing on changes in the incidence of deadly violence over 700 years of European history is instructive, it is again important to remember that the total period that Pinker examines ranges back more than 12,000 years. Here the mass of evidence marshalled in *Better Angels* indicates that as human societies transitioned during this period from hunter-gatherer and hunter-horticulturist societies to those governed by states, death rates from violence declined dramatically. As Pinker points out:

Modern Western countries, even in their most war-torn centuries, suffered no more than around a quarter of the average death rate of non-state societies, and less than a tenth of that for the most violent one.³

And, as Chapter 1 makes clear, a very similar trend is evident for homicide rates in the transition from non-state to state-based societies.

Finally, we note that the violence described in *Better Angels* includes a wide range of violent practices that do not necessarily kill their victims and thus are not counted in the fatality datasets. These include slavery, torture, cruel and inhumane punishments, and the physical abuse of children and the mentally ill. Most of these practices have been eliminated, proscribed, or greatly reduced in recent centuries. These changes have not been challenged by any of the critics of the declinist thesis.

Is Organized Criminal Violence Becoming a Greater Threat Than War?

The large majority of countries in the world are not plagued by wars, while all suffer lethal criminal violence, so it is not surprising that far more people worldwide die as a result of homicides than warfare.

Most of the focus in the declinist literature has been on war, yet relatively little attention has been paid to homicides. But, like Steven Pinker, the researchers associated with the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence have made a strong case for looking at trends in *all* forms of lethal violence. The period that they focus on does not, however, encompass millennia but simply the few recent decades for which the UN has global homicide data.

Mexico's homicide rate, while high, is actually lower than those of other regional states that are also deeply affected by drug-related organized crime.

The analyses of the Geneva Declaration researchers have drawn attention to what Steven Zyck and Robert Muggah have described as “[t]he growing scale and significance of chronic organised criminal violence, often sustained by trans-national crime networks.”⁴ Nowhere has this trend been more evident than in Mexico where, in 2011, the death toll from drug-related organized criminal violence was higher than the battle-death toll of the war in Afghanistan or Sudan or Iraq.

When we look at homicide *rates*, rather than absolute numbers, we find that Mexico's rate per 100,000 of the population per year was considerably *lower* than those in four other Central American states that have also been deeply affected by drug-related organized crime. And homicide rates associated with organized criminal violence were not just high—in the first decade of the twenty-first century they grew substantially, not just in Mexico but also in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Belize.

So, while the civil wars that plagued much of Central America were mostly over by the early 1990s, a deadly new form of organized killing appeared to have replaced the lethal violence of warfare.

Organized and drug-related criminal violence is not, of course, restricted to Central America. It also afflicts Afghanistan, Southeast Asia's “Golden Triangle,” and parts of West

Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and southern Europe. This raises an interesting question: have there been dramatic increases in organized criminal violence in these regions as well? And if so, might any such increases be greater than the uneven decline in violent war deaths?

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) cannot provide a definitive answer to this question because the homicide data it receives from national governments around the world rarely distinguish between homicides perpetrated by criminal organizations and the far more numerous “individual” homicides that take place, most of them within families or between acquaintances.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP’s) armed conflict dataset on which Pinker, the *Human Security Report*, other researchers, and many international agencies rely can, in principle, provide an answer to this question. Since 1989 UCDP has been seeking to track all forms of *organized* violence—criminal as well as political. (It does not track individual homicides.) However, in practice, as we point out in Chapter 2,

UCDP’s stringent data coding rules mean that a large percentage of the deaths that result from organized criminal violence in Mexico and elsewhere cannot be coded and therefore do not get recorded.

Chapter 2 reviews the very limited data on organized criminal violence around the world. It concludes that the increasing and extraordinarily high levels of lethal violence perpetrated by organized gangs in Mexico and Central America in the first decade of the twenty-first century are not representative of the rest of the world.

Moreover, even in this region there are signs of change. The number of homicides attributable to organized crime in Mexico declined by some 28 percent from 2011 to 2012 according to the Mexican government.⁵

In Guatemala the murder rate declined substantially between 2009 and 2011.⁶ In El Salvador a 2012 agreement signed between rival organized crime gangs led to a sharp decline in the murder rate. In the first half of 2013, the number of homicides dropped by one-third compared with the first half of 2012.⁷

There is, of course, no guarantee that these encouraging declines will continue, but at the very least they serve to remind us that there is nothing inevitable about high and rising homicide rates in countries afflicted by drug-related organized crime. The 50-percent-plus drop in Colombia’s homicide rate that the UN recorded for the period between 2002 and 2010 is a further reminder of how quickly crime rates associated with drug trafficking can decline in the Americas.⁸ By the end of 2012, the murder rate in Colombia—until recently the major source of the world’s cocaine supply—was at its lowest in 27 years.⁹

The number of homicides attributable to organized crime in Mexico declined by some 28 percent from 2011 to 2012 according to the Mexican government.

Are Global Homicide Rates Increasing Overall?

There is no doubt that war deaths from injuries have decreased dramatically since the end of World War II, but we have little idea about global trends in homicides.

For most of the World War II period there are no reliable homicide data for developing countries. Even today the data for some countries—most of them in sub-Saharan Africa—are either non-existent or highly unreliable.

It is possible, then, that homicides could have increased worldwide since World War II, while war deaths declined. The 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence (GBAV)* report, for example, found that between 2004 and 2009, the worldwide non-conflict homicide rate increased by some 5 percent. But no conclusions—particularly about long-term trends—should be drawn from the world homicide data compiled by UNODC.

This is because, until recently, many poor-country governments did not report homicide data to UNODC. Times are changing, however, and every year more national statistics offices in the developing world are collecting and reporting homicides to the UN. This matters because, on average, low-income countries tend to have higher homicide rates than medium- and high-income countries, so adding more poor-country data to the UNODC's global homicide database will have the effect of *increasing* the average global homicide rate. In other words, the increase that the *GBAV* researchers recorded between 2004 and 2009 may well be a function of more reporting of homicides rather than more actual homicides.

But there is a more compelling reason for being skeptical that homicide rates have been increasing worldwide, and not just between 2004 and 2009. As Chapter 2 points out, on average, medium- and high-income countries tend to have substantially lower homicide rates than low- and low-medium-income countries. We would expect, therefore, that as income levels rise on average in the developing world—as they have done substantially since the end of World War II—homicide rates would tend to fall.

Any such declines will likely be driven by the growth and consolidation of the power of national governments—i.e., essentially the same factors that Pinker argues drove the “pacification” and “civilizing” processes in Europe and elsewhere. Higher incomes do not in themselves cause violence to decline, of course, but rather they are associated with increased state capacity. In practice this means that as national incomes increase, states have more resources to deter, stop, and otherwise prevent violent crime.

Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

As this *Report* makes clear, key findings presented in *Better Angels* are contested. This is not surprising since the data that could resolve many of the disputed factual claims, particularly from past centuries in what we now call the developing world, are either non-existent or too sparse and fragmented to reliably indicate global trends. And even when there is no doubt about the global decline in a particular form of violence over a particular period—as is the case with the reduction in the number and deadliness of interstate wars after World War II, for example—the causes of that decline can be—and are—disputed.

The most arresting findings in *Better Angels* are those that point to the extraordinary millennia-long declines in homicide and war death rates that have been associated with the transitions from hunter-gatherer and horticulturalist societies to those governed by states. There is, as noted previously, some controversy about the mortality data from violence from the very earliest hunter-gatherer societies. But even Douglas Fry, the most prominent critic of *Better Angels'* analysis of the pre-historic era, does not dispute the data that indicate that lethal violence declined *after* 10,000 BCE as the anarchy of nomadic non-state societies began to be replaced by the spread of early civilizations and state-based systems of social control. The remarkable trend data that Pinker has collated on homicide rates in Europe from medieval times to the present lend further support to the declinist thesis. These data have not been challenged.

The case for pessimism about the global security future is well rehearsed and has support within the research community.

The most encouraging data from the modern era come from the post–World War II years. This period includes the dramatic decline in the number and deadliness of international wars since the end of World War II and the reversal of the decades-long increase in civil war numbers that followed the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.

What are the chances that these positive changes will be sustained? No one really knows. There are too many future unknowns to make predictions with any degree of confidence. And Pinker makes it very clear that his thesis seeks to explain the decline of violence in the past, not to predict the future.

Moreover, the case for pessimism about the global security future is well rehearsed and has considerable support within the research community. Major sources of concern include the possibility of outbreaks of nuclear terrorism, a massive transnational upsurge of lethal Islamist radicalism, or wars triggered by mass droughts and population movements driven by climate change.

Pinker notes reasons for concern about each of these potential future threats but also skepticism about the more extreme claims of the conflict pessimists. Other possible drivers of global violence include the political crises that could follow the collapse of the international financial system and destabilizing shifts in the global balance of economic and military power—the latter being a major concern of realist scholars worried about the economic and military rise of China.

But focusing exclusively on factors and processes that may increase the risks of large-scale violence around the world, while ignoring those that decrease it, also almost certainly leads to unduly pessimistic conclusions.

In the current era, factors and processes that reduce the risks of violence not only include the enduring impact of the long-term trends identified in *Better Angels* but also the disappearance of two major drivers of warfare in the post–World War II period—colonialism

and the Cold War. Other post–World War II changes that have reduced the risks of war include the entrenchment of the global norm against interstate warfare except in self-defence or with the authority of the UN Security Council; the intensification of economic and financial interdependence that increases the costs and decreases the benefits of cross-border warfare; the spread of stable democracies; and the caution-inducing impact of nuclear weapons on relations between the major powers.

With respect to civil wars, the emergent and still-growing system of global security governance discussed in Chapter 1 has clearly helped reduce the number of intrastate conflicts since the end of the Cold War. And, at what might be called the “structural” level, we have witnessed steady increases in national incomes across the developing world. This is

There is reason to believe that the historical decline in violence is both real and substantial.

important because one of the strongest findings from econometric research on the causes of war is that the risk of civil wars declines as national incomes—and hence governance and other capacities—increase. Chapter 1 reports on a remarkable recent statistical study by the Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) that found that if current trends in key structural variables are sustained, the proportion of the world’s countries afflicted by civil wars will halve by 2050.

Such an outcome is far from certain, of course, and for reasons that have yet to be imagined, as well as those canvassed by the conflict pessimists. But, thanks in substantial part to Steven Pinker’s extraordinary research, there are now compelling reasons for believing that the historical decline in violence is both real and remarkably large—and also that the future may well be less violent than the past.

Part II: Trends in Human Security

Part II of this *Report* examines trends in organized violence around the world, drawing on 2011 data from UCDP. After Part II of this Report was completed, however, UCDP released its 2012 armed conflict data that, among other things, revealed the good news that the number of armed conflicts being fought around the world declined from 37 to 32. This reduction came about in part because of an upsurge in peace agreements in 2012. The bad news is that the escalating carnage in Syria meant a dramatic increase in the number of worldwide battle deaths in 2012. Indeed, the Syrian battle-death toll last year was the world’s highest since the World War I–style interstate war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1999.¹⁰

Trends in Armed Conflict, 1989–2011

Part II of this *Report* presents graphs based on updated data to illustrate trends in the three categories of violence tracked by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). It finds that both state-based and non-state armed conflicts were at fairly high levels in 2011.

With regard to one-sided violence, global levels of campaigns and deaths remained relatively low despite a surge in the Middle East and North Africa.

Part II presents graphs based on data from the following three categories of organized violence, on which the Human Security Report Project has been reporting since 2005:

- State-based armed conflicts—international conflicts and civil wars—in which at least one of the warring parties is the government of a state.
- Non-state armed conflicts, which consist of fighting between two armed groups, neither of which is the government of a state.
- One-sided violence, or targeted attacks against unarmed civilians.

This part of the *Report* begins with a special focus on violence associated with the Arab Spring, a wave of protests, demonstrations, and armed conflict that began in late 2010 and continued in some countries throughout 2011 and 2012 (Chapter 3).

Arab Spring-related events in 2011 fell into all three categories of organized violence, from the mostly state-based violence in Libya, to the overwhelmingly one-sided nature of the killing in Syria. In some countries, such as Tunisia, the violence that occurred—while clearly significant—did not meet the requirements for coding into UCDP data. The different situations in various Arab Spring countries, and how they are reflected in UCDP’s datasets, are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 examines trends in the number and severity of state-based armed conflicts. In 2011, the number of state-based conflicts was relatively high; however the number of resulting battle deaths remained fairly low. Indeed, the chapter demonstrates that while the number of high-intensity conflicts—those causing 1,000 or more battle deaths in a year—has declined, the number of low-intensity conflicts has increased. As we have shown in the *Human Security Report 2012*, low-intensity conflicts are among the most difficult to resolve. Of the high-intensity armed conflicts active in 2011, only one—that in Libya—was directly related to the Arab Spring, while the others had already been ongoing in previous years.

As the number of high-intensity conflicts—those causing 1,000-plus battle deaths in a year—declined, the number of low-intensity conflicts increased.

Chapter 4 also finds that civil wars (intrastate conflicts) continue to be more common than conflicts between two countries (interstate conflicts). The single interstate conflict active in 2011, between Thailand and Cambodia, was low in intensity and pales in comparison to the type of interstate war seen in most decades of the Twentieth century. Many of today’s conflicts still have an international dimension to them. When a foreign government provides troops to support one or more combatants in intrastate conflicts, this is coded as an internationalized intrastate conflict. This type of conflict has become more common in recent years. Finally, Chapter 4 shows that, as has been the case since 2005,

Central and South Asia remains the most deadly region in 2011. This is mostly due to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even here, however, the number of battle deaths dropped by 50 percent from 2009 to 2011.

Chapter 5 presents recent trends in non-state armed conflicts and battle deaths. It shows that both conflicts and battle deaths have become more numerous in recent years, resulting mostly from increases in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa. The non-state category includes conflicts between actors of different levels of organization. Non-state armed conflicts range from clashes between armed members of tribes or other communities, to conflicts between more organized actors such as the cartels fighting each other in Mexico.

Chapter 6 describes the latest data and trends in one-sided violence around the world. It finds that despite increases in the Middle East and North Africa due to the Arab Spring, the numbers of both campaigns and deaths are at low levels compared with other years covered by the data. The years 2010 and 2011 saw historically low levels of one-sided violence in sub-Saharan Africa, which partially offset the increases seen in the Middle East and North Africa. We discuss a number of other significant developments in 2010 and 2011, such as the first years of one-sided violence in Europe recorded since 2004.



Vladimirs Koskins / Dreamstime.

PART I

A WORLDWIDE DECLINE IN VIOLENCE?

Since the end of the 1990s there has been a growing—and increasingly heated—debate over recent and longer term trends in violence around the world. Proponents of what has become known as the “declinist thesis” argue that violence has declined worldwide. Some critics reject the claim that violence has declined; others accept the basic “declinist” thesis but challenge the explanations that seek to account for it.

A WORLDWIDE DECLINE IN VIOLENCE?

Chapter 1: The Decline of Violence and Its Critics 17

In 2011 three studies were published that argued that there had been a profound and worldwide decline in the incidence of warfare around the world. Two of the studies focused on warfare in the post–World War II era; the third argued that there had been a millennia-long decline, not just in warfare but in all forms of violence. All three studies presented a major challenge to widely held assumptions about violence, and their findings have been challenged. The debate that has resulted is the focus of Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: War, Criminal Violence, and Human Security:

Unpacking the Puzzles 49

In 2011 the death toll from organized criminal violence in Mexico was greater than the 2011 death toll from the world’s deadliest war—in Afghanistan. In Central America homicide rates were even higher than in Mexico—and rose throughout the 2000s. Since criminal violence kills far more people than does warfare, an interesting question arises. Is it possible that rising homicide rates have more than offset the decline in deaths from warfare? If so this would appear to be a major challenge to the thesis that all forms of lethal violence are declining worldwide. Chapter 2 reviews the evidence.



Dreamstime.

CHAPTER 1

The Decline of Violence and Its Critics

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2000, political scientist Ted Robert Gurr argued that ethnic warfare is on the wane.¹¹ At the time such a claim was deeply counter-intuitive and Gurr's thesis was met with widespread skepticism by senior UN (United Nations) officials, for whom the 1990s was the worst period in the organization's history. This was, after all, the decade of Bosnia and the massacre at Srebrenica, the debacle in Somalia, and the genocide in Rwanda—all major UN failures. And less than a year before Gurr's article appeared, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces were deployed to end "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo.

But Gurr was correct. The UN disasters were real enough, but the Minorities at Risk data that he drew on showed that ethnic warfare as defined by Gurr and his colleagues—which made up most of the civil wars going on at the time—had peaked in the early 1990s and had subsequently declined.¹²

Gurr was not the first to argue that there had been a decline in warfare in the post-World War II period. In 1987 John Lewis Gaddis pointed out the post-World War II era had seen an unprecedentedly long period of peace between the US and the Soviet Union.¹³ And John Mueller argued in 1989 that major warfare between developed countries had become, if not obsolete, at least obsolescent.¹⁴

But while there have been very few interstate wars during the last two decades, the number of civil wars rose steadily, peaking in 1992 before beginning a significant decline.

The number of ethnic wars being fought around the world peaked in the early 1990s and then declined.

Gurr's *Foreign Affairs* article on ethnic wars was the first to draw attention to this latter change. In the new millennium, a series of new studies confirmed the downward trend.

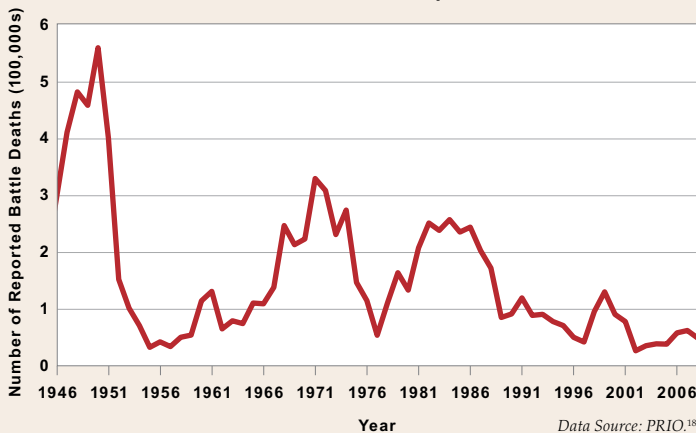
In 2001 the first edition of the *Peace and Conflict* series was published by the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. Drawing on a different dataset from Gurr's, it found that "[t]he number and magnitude of armed conflicts within and among states have lessened since the early 1990s by nearly half."¹⁵

In 2002 a much-cited article in the *Journal of Peace Research* presented the findings of another new dataset, this one from Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). It, too, showed the overall number of armed conflicts around the world had declined substantially since the end of the Cold War.¹⁶

In 2005 PRIO's Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch published a major study on the trend in global battle deaths since the end of World War II. The authors produced "high," "low," and "best" estimates of *battle deaths*—combatants and civilians caught in the crossfire.

The new dataset showed that there had been a dramatic, but very uneven, decline in battle deaths since the early 1950s (see Figure 1.1).¹⁷ Much of the decline in battle deaths in this period was due to the reduced number of interstate wars. Such wars are, on average, far more deadly than civil wars.

Figure 1.1 Global Trends in Battle Deaths from State-Based Conflicts, 1946–2008



A number of research organizations have been reporting a global drop in battle deaths for several years. The decline since the end of World War II has been uneven, but there can be no doubt about the direction of the trend.

Although the findings of these studies generated considerable interest in the relatively small conflict research community, they made little impact on policy-makers or the media. This changed in 2005. Drawing on the new datasets and a wide range of other research findings, the first *Human Security Report (HSR)* offered a comprehensive analysis of not only

the half-century decline in battle deaths since the early 1950s, but also the post–Cold War decline in the number of conflicts.

The Human Security Report Project (HSRP) team put a major effort into outreach, making its analysis accessible to policy-makers as well as researchers and getting the media coverage needed to make its findings more widely known. This strategy appeared to pay off with the *Report* generating huge media coverage around the world. There were radio and TV interviews, newspaper editorials, and news stories and feature articles in more than 60 countries and some 18 languages.

However, the notion that we are living in an ever more violent world proved resilient. Some six years later, Gregg Easterbrook, contributing editor to the *Atlantic*, the *New Republic*, and the *Washington Monthly*, could still write that the decline of war and other forms of violence was “the no. 1 overlooked story in the international media.”¹⁹

Pinker’s most startling claim is that the intentional violence that human beings perpetrate against each other had been declining for millennia.

In 2011 the “declinist” debate was taken to a new level with the publication of Steven Pinker’s widely acclaimed study, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. What distinguished Pinker’s analysis from those writing on the post–World War II decline in battle deaths, and the post–Cold War decline in conflicts, was both its historical sweep—from circa 10,000 BCE to the present day—and its disciplinary

range, embracing history, archaeology, psychology, evolutionary theory, macro-sociology, political science, and game theory.

Pinker’s most startling claim was that the intentional violence that human beings perpetrate against each other had been declining for millennia. Based on almost 700 pages of analysis, and, where available, by statistical data, he concludes that in the twenty-first century, “we may be living in the most peaceable era in our species’ existence.”²⁰

The year 2011 also saw the publication of Joshua Goldstein’s well-received *Winning the War on War*, which argued that: “We have avoided nuclear wars, left behind world war, nearly extinguished interstate war, and reduced civil wars to fewer countries with fewer casualties.”²¹

Around the same time Pinker’s and Goldstein’s books appeared, a new *Human Security Report* was launched whose main themes were the causes of peace and the shrinking costs of war.²² The *HSR* covered much of the same ground as *Winning the War on War*, and Chapters 5 and 6—“The Long Peace” and “The New Peace”—of Pinker’s study.

All three studies relied on the new conflict datasets described earlier; each also sought to explain the causes of the declines that they described.

Although by 2011 the declinist thesis was becoming more established in the mainstream international studies discourse, the three publications inevitably came under attack from academic and other skeptics.²³ This was especially true of Pinker’s book that not only

ranged across thousands of years but also drew on a dozen or so academic disciplines and sub-disciplines. It was bound to tread on a lot of academic toes.

This chapter examines the declinist thesis, focusing particular attention on Pinker's analysis of the millennia-long decline in violence and some of the objections that have been raised against it.

It is easy to forget how dangerous life used to be, how deeply brutality was once woven into the fabric of daily existence.

We also review a remarkable new study by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan²⁴ whose main—and rather surprising—finding was that non-violent campaigns to bring down repressive regimes and expel foreign occupiers have, on average, been far more effective than those that relied on violence.

While Chenoweth and Stephan do not engage with the declinist debate directly, their findings suggest a possible new explanation for why political violence should have declined worldwide—one that none of the declinist authors have considered.

Steven Pinker on the Decline in the Deadliness of Warfare

The Better Angels of Our Nature is one of the very few studies that have sought to examine trends in violence throughout human history.²⁵

In reaching back thousands of years in his investigations of the extent and deadliness of lethal violence, Pinker finds that since the pre-historic era of human existence, there has been a remarkable, though uneven, decline in rates of intentional violence—homicides as well as warfare. This trend, he argues, “may be the most important thing that has ever happened in human history.”²⁶

For many people this is a deeply counter-intuitive assertion, but, as Pinker points out:

It is easy to forget how dangerous life used to be, how deeply brutality was once woven into the fabric of daily existence. Cultural memory pacifies the past, leaving us with pale souvenirs whose bloody origins have been bleached away.²⁷

The Pacification Process

Better Angels argues that the beginning of the decline in violence can be traced back to the end of the pre-historic period, and to the “pacification” process that followed, and was associated with the first agricultural civilizations. These sharply reduced the uncontrolled raiding and feuding that prevailed in pre-historic societies and led to “a more or less fivefold decrease in rates of violent deaths.”²⁸

The analysis, which stretches back to 10,000 BCE, draws on archaeological evidence to reveal the staggeringly high war or violent death rates in the pre-historic era. The physical evidence from archaeological sites suggests that, on average, wars in pre-historic societies

left some 15 percent of the population dead from injuries.²⁹ There are also data from hunter-gatherer societies of more recent times—i.e., communities that, like the pre-historic non-state societies, were not governed by states. Here, too, the average war death rate was extraordinarily high—14 percent of the warring populations.³⁰

The contrast between the average war death rates for these non-state societies and the war death rates in state societies is striking. Let us consider the death rates of the two deadliest centuries of warfare in modern European history.

In the seventeenth century, Europe's wars of religion had killed some 2 percent of the populations of the warring states according to Quincy Wright.³¹ In the wars of the twentieth century—which included two world wars—by contrast just 0.7 percent of the population are estimated to have died in battle.³² So, on average, the non-state wars of the pre-history period were many times deadlier than the wars of the twentieth century.

If the 0.7 percent figure for the rate of deaths in warfare in the twentieth century appears rather small, this is likely because we are not used to seeing conflict deaths expressed as percentages of a country's population. In fact, 0.7 percent of a population is a very high death toll. As a percentage of today's population of the United States, for example, it would amount to almost 2.2 million deaths. To put this in perspective, World War II, the deadliest war for the United States in the twentieth century, killed 405,399 American soldiers.³³ The 14–15 percent of population death rate that was the average in wars between non-state societies would translate into more than 45 million deaths in the case of today's United States.

The data from the past, and most particularly the distant past, are fragmentary and subject to considerable uncertainty.

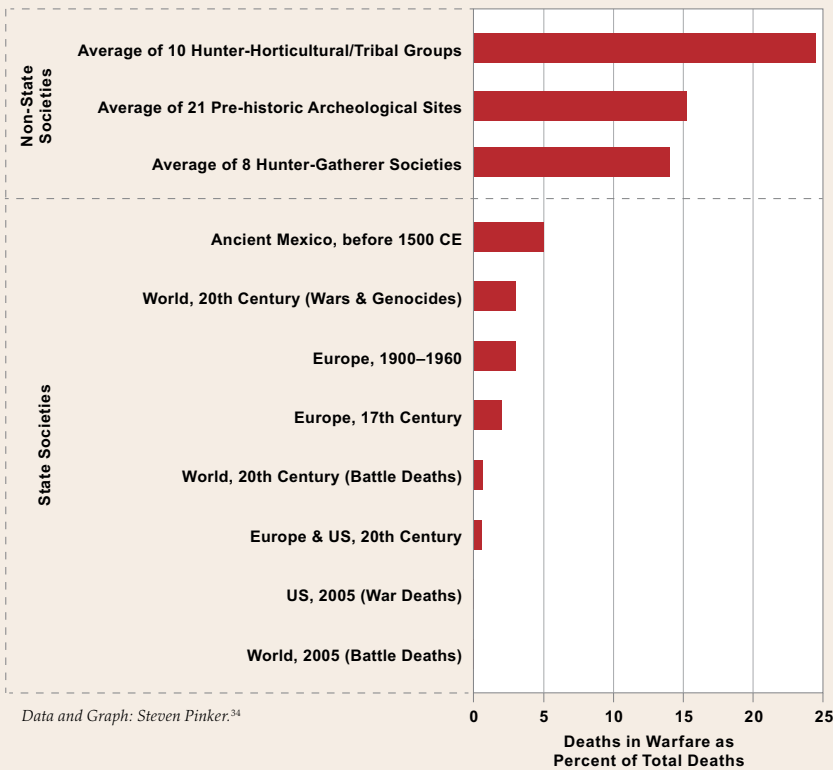
In the seventeenth century, Europe's wars of religion had killed some 2 percent of the populations of the warring states according to Quincy Wright.

It is true, of course, that wars in the era of states produce far greater absolute numbers of fatalities than those of pre-state societies, not because state wars have higher death rates, but because states have far larger populations than non-state societies.

The data from the past, and in particular the distant past, are fragmentary and subject to considerable uncertainty. But the fact that

the estimated war death rates in the pre-pacification period are so much greater than those in wars fought within and between states suggests that the long-term decline is both real and very large.

Figure 1.2 is a simplified version of one of Pinker's graphs. It shows that a significantly greater percentage of people were killed by violence in non-state societies than in societies with more-developed political institutions.

Figure 1.2 Deaths in Warfare in State and Non-State Societies

Non-state societies tend to be much more violent than societies where state institutions hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As a percent of total deaths, battle deaths from recent wars pale in comparison.

The Civilizing Process

The second major historical shift in trends in violence was the long-term decline in the rate of inter-personal violence that began in late medieval Europe. Part of the reason for this decline was that from the eleventh or twelfth to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,³⁵ a major cultural change was underway in Europe.

During this period,

Europeans increasingly inhibited their impulses, anticipated the long-term consequences of their actions, and took other people's thoughts and feelings into consideration. A culture of honor—the readiness to take revenge—gave way to a culture of dignity—the readiness to control one's emotions.³⁶

This normative shift, which Pinker, following Norbert Elias, calls the “Civilizing Process,” was associated with the extension of state control, which was based in considerable part on

the emergence of centralized states that exercised coercive power over their citizens but also acquired increasing legitimacy. The period also witnessed the rapid growth of commerce, which “presented people with more positive-sum games and reduced the attractiveness of zero-sum plunder.”³⁷

Pinker makes a persuasive case that the combined effect of these changes was a major driver of the remarkable long-term decline in inter-personal violence. Across Western and Northern Europe, homicide rates have fallen significantly—though not uniformly—since the late Middle Ages.³⁸

The “Long Peace” started after the end of World War II. It marked the end of wars between the great powers, and a major decline in lesser interstate wars.

The Humanitarian Revolution

The third major driver of the decline in violence Pinker attributes to the “Humanitarian Revolution”—a process in which “[p]eople began to *sympathize* with more of their fellow humans, and were no longer indifferent to their suffering.”³⁹ This revolution, which took place in Europe from the beginning of the Age of Reason in the seventeenth century and peaked in the Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth, led to a sharp reduction or elimination of a range of long-standing violent practices, including witch hunts, torture, cruel and barbaric punishments, and slavery.⁴⁰

The Decline in Warfare and State Repression since World War II

In his argument about the Humanitarian Revolution, Pinker shows that “[t]he Age of Reason and the Enlightenment brought many violent institutions to a sudden end,”⁴¹ but he admits that two other violent institutions “had more staying power, and were indulged in large parts of the world for another two centuries.”⁴² The two institutions were “tyranny, and war between major states.”⁴³ But by the end of the twentieth century these had declined as well.

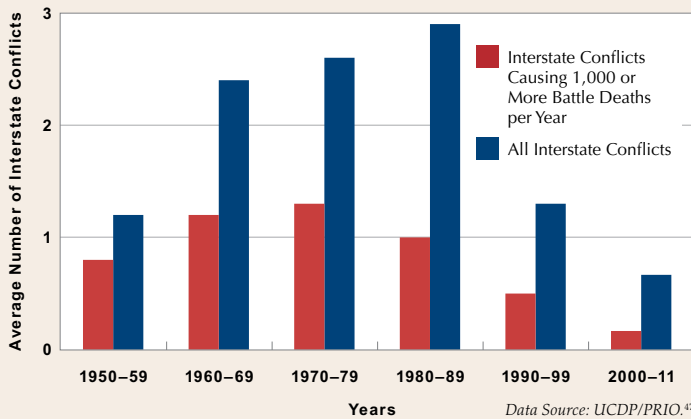
The Long Peace

What has become known as the “Long Peace”—Pinker’s fourth trend—started after the end of World War II and marked the effective end of wars between the great powers. What Pinker describes as the “most interesting statistic since 1945”⁴⁴ does not lend itself well to being displayed in a chart. This is because it is a single number—zero:

Zero is the number that applies to an astonishing collection of categories of war during the two-thirds of a century that has elapsed since the end of the deadliest war of all time.⁴⁵

“Zero” refers to the use of nuclear weapons in war; to the number of wars between the two Cold War superpowers; to the number of great-power wars since 1953; and to the number of interstate wars in Western Europe or between major developed powers.⁴⁶

Figure 1.3 Average Number of Interstate Conflicts per Year by Decade, 1950–2011



Conflicts between states—especially high-intensity conflicts—have become very rare since 1989. There has been less than one interstate conflict per year on average since 2000, down from almost three during the 1980s.

Along with the disappearance of war between the major powers, there was also a dramatic reduction in overall interstate state conflict since the 1980s—the trend is very evident in Figure 1.3—and the large, but very uneven, decline in the numbers of people being killed in conflicts since World War II noted earlier.

This period also saw a decline in violent acts short of war and genocide, such as “rioting, lynching, and hate crimes ... rape, assault, battering, and intimidation.”⁴⁸ And, as Pinker observes, this decline extended to previously unprotected classes of victims, such as “racial minorities, women, children, homosexuals, and animals.”⁴⁹ Pinker calls these changes the “Rights Revolutions.”

But notwithstanding these positive changes and the fact that the average number of interstate wars per decade had decreased significantly, *overall* conflict numbers increased almost fourfold from 1952 to 1992, driven by a steep increase in civil wars. The explosion in the latter was in turn due in large part to two drivers. First were the struggles over control in newly formed states soon after they achieved independence from colonial powers; second was the Cold War that fuelled many “proxy wars” in the developing world.

The proxy wars faded with the end of the Cold War. With the end of this global confrontation came another major change.

Overall conflict numbers increased worldwide almost fourfold from 1952 to 1992, driven by a steep increase in civil wars.

The New Peace

The “New Peace” is the term Steven Pinker uses to describe the post–Cold War decline in “organized conflicts of all kinds—civil wars, genocides, repression by autocratic governments, and terrorist attacks.”⁵⁰

Perhaps the most remarkable change in this period was the steep decline in the number of repressive regimes around the world. According to the Center for Systemic Peace, which tracks trends in the number of autocracies and democracies in the international system, the number of repressive autocratic regimes has dropped from almost 90 in the mid- to late-1970s to just 20 today—a decline of nearly 80 percent.⁵¹ This remarkable worldwide reduction in the number of repressive regimes can be seen as a manifestation of the Rights Revolutions discussed above.

With respect to war, the changes in the post–Cold War period have been substantial. Not only have major wars become very rare but the number of battle deaths around the world also decreased as the Cold War wound down in the second half of the 1980s.

The New Peace of the post–Cold War period is also a central focus of Joshua Goldstein’s *Winning the War on War*. Goldstein writes:

The number of repressive autocratic regimes around the world dropped from almost 90 in the mid- to late-1970s to just 20 today.

In the first half of the twentieth century, world wars killed *tens of millions* and left whole continents in ruins. In the second half of that century, during the Cold War, proxy wars killed *millions*, and the world feared a nuclear war that could have wiped out our species. Now, in the early twenty-first century, the worst wars, such as Iraq, kill *hundreds of thousands*. We fear terrorist attacks that could destroy a city, but not life on the planet. The fatalities still represent a large number and the impacts of wars are still catastrophic for those caught in them, but overall, war has diminished dramatically.⁵²

The declines in the number and deadliness of wars, both between states and within them, that these and other studies have documented are relatively new phenomena and there is no guarantee that they will persist, a point stressed by both Pinker and Goldstein—and the *HSR*. But, as Chapter 1 of the 2009/2010 *HSR* pointed out, the factors driving the decline in interstate war are unlikely to disappear. The two most important are:

- The greatly strengthened normative proscription against resorting to war, except in self-defence or with the authorization of the UN Security Council.
- The dramatically increased costs and decreased benefits of interstate war.

When we look at the decline in civil war numbers, we see that the Cold War, as one of the major system-wide drivers of past conflicts, no longer exists and certainly will not come back.

WAR WITHOUT WEAPONS:

HOW NON-VIOLENT CAMPAIGNS REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF WAR

Over the past four decades, there has been an astonishing, though little noticed, decline in the number of autocratic regimes around the world. In the mid-1970s, there were some 84 autocracies worldwide; by 2012 there were just 20—a 75 percent decline.⁵³

This shift has been evident to a greater or lesser degree in every region of the world.

Successful campaigns of non-violent direct action have played a substantial role in helping drive this decline. From the late 1970s to 2006, there were 39 such campaigns against autocratic regimes—almost half were successful. This success rate was substantially greater than that of violent insurrections. During this period, few autocratic regimes were overthrown by rebel armies or deposed by foreign military intervention.

Just how successful non-violent campaigns have become over the past century, both in absolute terms and relative to armed struggles, was revealed in a path-breaking 2011 study entitled *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan.⁵⁴ Drawing on a new dataset of some 323 violent and non-violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006, the authors tracked the long-term increase in the number of non-violent campaigns and compared their success rates with those that relied on armed violence.⁵⁵

Their data show that not only has the frequency of non-violent campaigns increased since 1900 but so too has their success rate.⁵⁶

One of the study's most remarkable findings was that the success rate of non-violent campaigns against incumbent regimes was more than double that of violent insurgencies.⁵⁷ And since 1980, the overall success rate of non-violent campaigns has increased still further while that of violent insurgencies has declined.

In the 1980s, for example, some 52 percent of non-violent campaigns were successful, compared with less than 40 percent of violent campaigns. But between 2000 and 2006 (the last year for which the study has data), non-violent campaigns were successful in 70 percent of cases; violent campaigns in less than 15 percent.

These striking findings suggest a possible additional explanation for the decline in the number of major armed conflict numbers since the end of the Cold War. As opponents of autocratic regimes have become increasingly aware of the successes of non-violent resistance campaigns, more and more of them have chosen to reject the much less successful—and far deadlier—option of armed struggle.

It is quite possible, in other words, that we are witnessing an important substitution effect—with activists choosing to pursue campaigns of non-violent direct action rather than

decreasingly successful violent resistance campaigns. If this is case, then, other things being equal, we have an important additional explanation for the decline in major armed conflicts around the world.

This is difficult to prove. The two strategic approaches could, in theory, be completely unrelated. This seems highly unlikely, however. There is ample evidence in the security studies literature to show that conflict strategies pursued successfully in one context tend to be emulated in others. With respect to non-violent struggles, the emulation effect is also well documented.

How likely is it that the successes achieved by the type of non-violent campaigns examined by Chenoweth and Stephan will continue? This is difficult to gauge. However, in addition to the strategic emulation effect, there are two other persuasive grounds for believing that the rise in the number and success rate of major non-violent campaigns is not accidental and that the conditions that facilitated the increased post-Cold War successes of non-violent campaigns may well continue to prevail.

First, there is what might be called the *structural* argument. Here the suggestion is that as the structure of societies becomes more complex and interdependent, increasing numbers of individuals and groups within civil society acquire roles that are indispensable for the effective functioning of the state. Equally important, the individuals who occupy these roles are effectively unsubstitutable—i.e., they cannot be easily replaced—as can unskilled workers.⁵⁸

One consequence of these changes is that it has become extraordinarily difficult for complex modern states to govern by brute coercion. Effective governance requires high levels of cooperation between citizens and key non-state groups. The denial of such cooperation thus becomes an increasingly potent source of leverage for non-violent resistance movements.

Second, and relatedly, there has been a major normative shift over the last 30-plus years—one that rejects authoritarian modes of governance and embraces democratization. This worldwide shift, one that has been embraced by elites as well as citizens, is evident not just in the huge decline in the number of autocracies since the late 1970s but also by the fact that the number of democracies has more than doubled. The successful high-profile non-violent campaigns waged against autocratic governments during this period have likely helped drive this normative shift—and have, in turn, been inspired by it.

This suggests that the increase in the number and success rate of civilian resistance campaigns has not only played a *direct* causal role in bringing down authoritarian regimes but has also played an important *indirect* role by helping strengthen the global norm against autocratic governance.

The success of non-violent campaigns may, in other words, be even greater than Chenoweth and Stephan's thought-provoking study has shown.

Pinker, Goldstein, and the HSRP research team are all on the same page with respect to a key *proximate* cause of the New Peace, namely efforts by the international community to end conflicts and prevent them from starting again. These factors are part of what the 2009/2010 HSR calls the “emerging system of security governance.”⁵⁹ This system, which is increasingly accepted and well entrenched, is effective but very far from perfect:

[It is] rife with coordination problems, disagreements over strategy, and unresolved tensions between international agencies, states, and NGOs. It is a system that is inherently inefficient and disputatious and—as Rwanda and Darfur remind us—prone to tragic failures. But the best evidence that we have suggests that its collective efforts have been a primary driver of the major decline in the deadliest forms of armed conflict since the end of the Cold War.⁶⁰

Explaining Long-Term Trends in Global Violence

Creating a coherent explanatory framework that can account for the changes in all major forms of violence—from world wars, genocide, terrorism, and torture, to beating children and cruelty to animals—is a hugely challenging task. It is especially difficult when the trends to be explained cover the thousands of years from the dawn of agricultural civilizations to the present, and when the data are rarely adequate and sometimes non-existent.

Better Angels addresses this challenge in several ways. As already noted, it identifies key historical shifts in the incidence of violence over the centuries, with each shift bringing about a reduction in violence. These shifts, which include the previously discussed Pacification Process, the Civilizing Process, the Humanitarian Revolution, the Long Peace, and the New Peace, have occurred at different times in different parts of the world. Thus, the Pacification Process was first associated with “the transition from the anarchy of the hunting, gathering, and horticultural societies ... to the first agricultural civilizations with cities and governments, some five thousand years ago.”⁶¹

In some societies this transition came centuries, or even thousands of years, later. In fact, a small number of hunter-gatherer societies continue to exist outside the state system—and many such societies experienced war death rates many times greater than the deadliest wars between states in the twentieth century.⁶²

It is a system that is
inefficient and—as
Rwanda reminds us—
prone to tragic failures.

Progress has rarely been linear and uninterrupted. Long-term declines in violence have been reversed—albeit temporarily. In the US, for example, homicide rates more than doubled in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶³ But such *de-civilizing* episodes are themselves reversible. From 1980 to 2010, US homicide rates more than halved, dropping to the level of the significantly less violent America of the 1950s and 1960s.

While there have been frequent reversals in the decline in violence, *Better Angels* makes the case that whether we focus on war, organized criminal violence, cruel and inhumane punishment, or even the mistreatment of animals, the long-term decline in violence is a reality that is as profound as it is often overlooked.

Pinker's analysis goes beyond identifying major shifts in overall levels of violence and their proximate causes to an examination of the psychological and cultural changes that undergird them.

Better Angels argues that the long-term decline in violence is a reality that is as profound as it is often overlooked.

Better Angels rejects the idea that violence is “a perennial urge like hunger, sex, or the need to sleep,”⁶⁴ and Pinker has little patience with the traditional and simplistic dichotomies about human nature—the idea that biology drives us to violence or not. Human beings clearly have the capacity for aggression, but equally, Pinker argues, they have an evolving capacity to control its expression. Human nature accommodates

motives that impel us to violence but also faculties that—under the right circumstances—cause us to reject it.

Pinker attributes aggressive attitudes and behaviours to “several psychological systems that differ in their environmental triggers, their internal logic, their neurological basis, and their social distribution.”⁶⁵

The incentive structures that give rise to violence include predation, dominance, revenge, sadism, and ideology.⁶⁶ Counteracting these “inner demons” are what Pinker calls the “better angels of our nature”—the reference being to US President Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address. The “better angels” are empathy, self-control, moral sense, and reason—their importance lies in the fact that they can orient people’s behaviour “away from violence and toward cooperation and altruism.”⁶⁷

Whether these “better angels” prevail over our “inner demons,” Pinker argues, depends to a great extent on the cultural mores of the time and historical contingency. And here he identifies five political, social, and cultural changes that he sees as key drivers of the decline in violence. These are:

- A consolidation of a monopoly of the legitimate use of force controlled by the state and the judiciary. This was the main driver of the shifts discussed earlier as the pacification and civilizing processes.
- The growing importance of commerce, leading to more interdependence between people and states and hence greater incentives to cooperate rather than use violence.
- *Feminization*, i.e., the process in which societies increasingly respect “the interests and values of women.”⁶⁸ The regions of the world in which the advancement of women has been held back, Pinker argues, “are the parts that lag in the decline in violence.”⁶⁹

- *Cosmopolitanism*, i.e., advances towards universal literacy, mobility, and information-sharing that “can prompt people to take the perspective of people unlike themselves and expand their circle of sympathy to embrace them.”⁷⁰
- *The escalator of reason*, by which is meant “an intensifying application of knowledge and rationality to human affairs.”⁷¹ This change was associated, among other things, with a reduction in the superstitions that both drove and legitimized cruel and violent practices common throughout most of human history—from human sacrifice, witch hunts, and slavery, to torturing animals for pleasure.

The overall impact of these processes has been to move away from “tribalism, authority and purity in moral systems and towards humanism, classical liberalism, autonomy and human rights.”⁷²

The remarkable but largely unrecognized consequence of these interrelated changes, Pinker argues, has been a dramatic long-term overall decline in the violence that human beings perpetrate against each other. And this may be “the most significant and least appreciated development in the history of our species.”⁷³

Other Explanations for the Decline in Violence

Pinker notes that many other factors that have been identified as major drivers of peace have not, in fact, “consistently worked to reduce violence.”⁷⁴ Consider the case of disarmament. It is taken as axiomatic among many proponents of disarmament, and most peace movement advocates, that more arms mean more wars. From this perspective it logically follows that disarmament should be an important prescription for peace—swords need to be beaten into ploughshares. And yet, as Pinker points out, “it’s hard to find any correlation over history between the destructive power of weaponry and the human toll of deadly quarrels.”⁷⁵

Since the end of World War II, for example, the destructive power of the world’s military arsenals has increased hugely, but the number of people killed in wars has declined dramatically. The key drivers of the Long Peace and the New Peace clearly had little to do with disarmament. In fact, the reduction of armaments has tended to *follow* the cessation of conflict, not cause it.

This does not mean that disarmament is never a force for peace; in some cases it can be critically important in reducing the risk of renewed conflict—which is why civil war peace agreements almost always include provisions for disarmament and demobilization programs. The point is that disarmament is not a *consistent* driver of the decline in warfare.

It is also clear that the absence of destructive military arsenals is no guarantee against mass violence. During the Rwandan genocide, which was by far the deadliest upsurge of violence since the end of World War II, the killing weapon of choice was a simple agricultural tool—the machete.⁷⁶

Second is the thesis, popular in some quarters, that claims that international wars are driven primarily by economic imperatives. Pinker points out that the US prosecution of the Vietnam War was seen by some critics as being caused by the drive to secure and maintain

access to tungsten and other strategic minerals.⁷⁷ And just a decade ago many critics argued that the need to gain secure access to Iraq's oil reserves was the real motive behind the US-led invasion in 2003. A popular peace movement slogan at the time was "No blood for oil!"

The idea that economic imperatives to ensure secure access to raw materials can be drivers of interstate war has considerable historical evidence to support it, and in democracies it is almost always possible to find some senior politician or official who will lend credence to such claims, even when they are disavowed by governments. Thus, in 2007, former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan noted in his memoirs, "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil."⁷⁸

But Greenspan, like others who stressed the importance of oil as a key factor motivating the invasion of Iraq, ignored the rather obvious fact that Saddam Hussein's regime never posed any threat to international access to Iraq's oil—quite the contrary. The Iraqi economy's survival was heavily dependent on maintaining its oil exports. And in an open international trading regime it is almost always far cheaper to buy oil than to invade another country in order to seize it.

This does not, of course, mean that economic motives never drive armed conflicts. According to the US Congressional Research Service, American forces intervened in foreign countries 234 times between 1798 and 1993. Most of these interventions were undertaken to "protect US citizens or *promote US interests*."⁷⁹

In an open international trading regime it is always cheaper to buy oil than to invade another country in order to seize it.

In a much-cited speech in 1933, two-time Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Major General Smedley Butler, who had served 33 years with the US Marine Corps, explained that much of his career had involved repeated military interventions overseas in support of American corporate interests:

I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street ... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909–1912 ... I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.⁸⁰

There is no doubt that many of the US military interventions of the early twentieth century that Smedley Butler came to regret were driven by Washington's concern to protect US corporate interests. It is also clear that the earlier invasion and colonization by European powers of much of what we now call the developing world was motivated in part by the perceived need to secure access to raw materials, cheap labour, and markets.

But while conflicts over resources have clearly been part of the “dynamic of history,” Pinker argues that they provide “little insight into grand trends in violence.”⁸¹

While the pursuit of economic interests by states operating in the international system has *sometimes* provided incentives for war, in the current era, the interdependencies that trade and foreign investment have created provide powerful incentives for avoiding mutually harmful interstate violence. As the world has become more interdependent, the costs of interstate war have risen, while its economic benefits have declined. Under such conditions, the economic self-interest of states is to trade, not invade—and the incentives for interstate war are reduced.

Much the same applies to realist theories of international security that make the case that peace is best assured by a stable balance of military power between individual states—and/or alliance systems. A *balance* of opposing forces means that the outcome of any conflict will be uncertain, while the human and economic costs will be extremely high because neither side can count on a quick victory. Where the perceived risks of going to war—for both sides—exceed the perceived benefits, deterrence prevails and war is avoided.

The interdependencies that trade and foreign investment have created provide states with powerful incentives to avoid interstate violence.

Realists attributed the Long Peace of the Cold War to a stable bipolar balance of power between East and West, and leading realist scholars like John Mearsheimer worried that the dissolution of this balance at the end of the 1980s could mean an end to stability and the resurgence of war in a new and unstable multipolar world.⁸²

Mearsheimer’s fears were unwarranted. Even though the bipolar balance that supposedly ensured stability collapsed, wars between states—the focus of Mearsheimer’s concern—have almost completely disappeared, while the overall number of major wars of all types being waged around the world—civil wars as well as wars between states—has more than halved since the end of the Cold War.

It is not that a stable power balance is *irrelevant* to peace—in some circumstances it may ensure it. Pinker’s point is again that it is far from being a consistent force for peace. In fact, the pursuit of military power balancing is a process strongly associated with arms races, and these in turn are associated with increased risks of war.⁸³

On the other hand, Pinker argues that the five historical forces discussed above—the monopoly of violence, commerce, feminization, cosmopolitanism, and the escalator of reason—are *enduring* forces for peace. They have worked consistently to counteract the “inner demons” of human nature—predation, dominance, revenge, sadism, and ideology. Over time, and notwithstanding many tragic reversals, the cultural changes taken together have decreased the probability that people will resort to violence in their interactions with each other.

A Multi-Level Explanatory Framework

Pinker's broad explanatory framework, with its stress on deep-lying psychological mechanisms and their socio-economic and cultural triggers, can easily accommodate the more proximate causes of the decline in violence identified in recent research on the causes of war and peace.⁸⁴

Many recent developments have reduced the incidence and deadliness of warfare: none, of course, has eliminated them.

Researchers studying the Long Peace of the post-World War II period have identified growing international economic interdependence—manifest in the dramatic increase in international trade and foreign direct investment—as one important disincentive for interstate war in this period. But Pinker points out that the pacifying effect of interdependence is a phenomenon whose genesis

lay centuries earlier. In a nod to the eighteenth-century economist Samuel Ricard, Pinker uses the term *gentle commerce*, by which he means the growth of the positive-sum economics of trade and the division of labour in the late Middle Ages—a shift that created new incentives to avoid violence when pursuing economic gain: “When it’s cheaper to buy something than to steal it, that changes the incentives, and you get each side valuing the other more alive than dead.”⁸⁵

Other changes that have been linked with the decline in violence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—the explosion of democratization, the extraordinary growth of international institutions, increasing levels of education, and the post-World War II shift in attitudes towards war and colonialism—are also clearly associated with the enduring, centuries-long socio-cultural, violence-constraining changes that are described in *Better Angels*.

While each of these changes has tended to reduce violence over time, none, of course, has eliminated it. And in some cases decreases in violence in one area have been accompanied by an increase in another—albeit to a lesser degree.

Thus, while the centralization of power that led to the creation of states sharply reduced the extraordinarily deadly violence associated with feuding and raiding in non-state societies, the violence between tribes and clansmen was replaced by “a lesser amount—but still a brutal form of violence—from the state against its citizens.”⁸⁶ And the Humanitarian Revolution that was associated with dramatic reductions in slavery, gruesome executions, witch-burning, torture, and other gross forms of cruelty was also the period during which the continued expansion and consolidation of state control ensured that great-power wars became more destructive.⁸⁷

The pacifying effect of international interdependence is a centuries old-phenomenon.

And although the Long Peace witnessed a dramatic reduction in interstate wars in the six-plus decades since the end of World War II, the number of intrastate conflicts more than trebled during the Cold War.

Such increases in violence may appear to undermine Pinker's basic thesis, but he points out that "every one of these developments has been systematically reversed."⁸⁸

Better Angels *Under Fire*

It is not surprising that the highly contrarian thesis of a millennia-long decline in violence should be met with surprise and some skepticism. Most people's understanding of the incidence of armed violence around the world comes from the media. But media reporting—not surprisingly—focuses on bad news. Violence makes headlines—its absence does not.

Most people's understanding of the amount of organized violence being perpetrated around the world comes from media reporting.

Things that do not happen are, by definition, not newsworthy—unless they happen to be presented in a provocatively contrarian manner as in *Better Angels*, Joshua Goldstein's *Winning the War on War*, and—earlier—the 2005 *Human Security Report*.

The present also seems more violent than the past because of what Pinker calls "historical myopia."⁸⁹ Our recollection of recent wars is far better than that of the struggles of the more distant past. As a result, it is hardly surprising that recent wars appear more violent.

And it is not just that our personal recollections of the past are affected by short-sightedness. In earlier eras, when violence was more commonplace, much of it went unrecorded. There is plenty of evidence that what Pinker calls "availability bias" seriously underestimates the deadliness of past wars.⁹⁰

Finally, the fact that the world's population has increased sevenfold over the past 200 years means that a war that killed a million people at the beginning of the nineteenth century would, relative to the global population, have been seven times more deadly than one that killed a million people at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

As Pinker puts it, "when one adjusts for population size, the availability bias and historical myopia, it is far from clear that the 20th century was the bloodiest in history."⁹¹

Is Violence Really Declining?

Although *Better Angels* has been widely praised for its erudition, scope, and originality, it has also been subject to considerable criticism, some of it fiercely hostile.⁹²

The first and most serious critique focuses on Pinker's assertion that World War II was not the deadliest period in human history. The second attacks Pinker's claim that the early hunter-gatherer and other non-state societies were far more violent than the state systems that followed them.

In other words, *Better Angels* is being attacked both for underestimating the extent of the violence of the twentieth century and overestimating the violence of early non-state societies. If true, these criticisms would undermine Pinker's central claim—that the violence that human beings perpetrate against each other has been in decline for millennia.

Pinker's preferred metric for determining the worldwide deadliness of warfare over time has generated a lot of controversy. *Better Angels* argues that the rate of violent war deaths as a proportion of population is the most appropriate determinant of the deadliness of particular wars—not the *absolute number* of individuals killed.

Using this metric, World War II is *not* the deadliest in history. It certainly caused a greater absolute number of violent deaths than did wars in earlier centuries, but it also encompassed countries that had far larger populations.⁹³

Many critics have challenged the appropriateness of this measure. In an otherwise sympathetic review, Robert Jervis asks: "In what way do tens of millions of deaths in wars ... become less significant because of the rise of world population, including in continents far distant from these atrocities? Morally, they do not."⁹⁴

Put another way, if World War II were to reoccur today—with the same death toll—would it be any less violent because the world's population is now almost three times larger than it was in the 1940s?

Pinker would surely not claim that the absolute World War II death toll would be any less tragic, particularly for its victims and their families, nor that it would have been in any sense less violent had it taken place in the 2000s rather than the 1940s. But his argument for using death *rates*—i.e., the number of war dead as a percentage of the population rather than *absolute numbers*—addresses a very different question: "If I were one of the people who were alive in a particular era, what would be the chances that I would be a victim of violence?"⁹⁵

To know the answer to this question, he argues, we need to focus "on the rate, rather than the number, of violent acts."⁹⁶

This is because when the population of a country or wider region grows:

so does the potential number of murderers and despots and rapists and sadists. So if the absolute number of victims of violence stays the same or even increases, while the proportion decreases, something important must have changed to allow all those extra people to grow up free of violence.⁹⁷

Better Angels includes a table that ranks wars and other major episodes of violence by the size of their death tolls. With an estimated death toll of 55 million, World War II is the deadliest single war in history in terms of absolute numbers of deaths. Yet, Pinker points out

Pinker is under attack for underestimating the violence of the 20th century and overestimating that of pre-state societies.

that despite the huge death toll, it is only the ninth most deadly war when the number of war deaths is adjusted to take into account population size.⁹⁸

Looking at war deaths as a percentage of the population, the deadliest conflict in history becomes the An Lushan Revolt and Civil War that killed an estimated 36 million people in eighth-century China. A comparably deadly war at the time of World War II would have generated 429 million deaths.⁹⁹

There are, of course, as Pinker points out, major questions about the accuracy of the earlier war death tolls, in part because definitions of what types of fatality should be attributed to warfare vary from source to source. Some historical estimates consider only deaths directly caused by war-related violence, while others include estimates of *indirect* deaths—i.e., deaths caused by war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. But here it is important to remember that while some war death estimates were surely exaggerated, huge numbers of violent deaths also went completely unrecorded.

Then there is the critical question of whether or not the *duration* of conflicts and other violent events should be taken into account in assessing their deadliness. In a sharply critical review of *Better Angels* for the *New Yorker*, Elizabeth Kolbert argues that the time periods over which large-scale violence takes place should be taken into account:

the Second World War was, proportionally speaking, the ninth-deadliest conflict of all time ... yet the war lasted just six years. The Arab slave trade, which ranks as No. 3 on Pinker's hit list, was an atrocity that took more than a millennium to unfold. The Mongol conquests, coming in at No. 2, spanned nearly a century.¹⁰⁰

Some historical fatality estimates consider only deaths directly caused by war-related violence, while others include estimates of indirect deaths.

But for Pinker it is not the “speed of killing” that matters but rather the total number of the resulting deaths relative to the size of the population. Against Kolbert’s criticism he poses a rhetorical question, “imagine that that slave trade was abolished after a year, or that Genghis Khan was defeated after a month, or that the Holocaust was called off after a week.” Would we not judge those events as vastly less violent?¹⁰¹

The answer is surely yes. But we would not judge these events as being vastly less violent because of the speed of killing but rather because the total number of people killed over a given period would be much smaller. Pinker’s response does not address this issue.

Moreover, elsewhere in *Better Angels*—notably in the discussion of the death rates of non-state versus state wars, the deadliness of wars in Europe over the last 900 or so years, and the analysis of long-term trends in homicide rates—the metric that Pinker relies on is deaths per hundred thousand of the population *per year*.¹⁰² This is the standard way of measuring the lethality of violence and for making comparisons across space or over time.

If this standard metric for measuring violent deaths had been used to determine the deadliest periods of armed violence in human history, then the relatively short duration of World War II, coupled with its very high absolute death toll, would make it the deadliest episode of mass violence in more than 1,000 years—since the An Lushan Revolt and Civil War in the eighth century. It might even be the deadliest toll in recorded history, since the estimate that Pinker reports for the An Lushan uprising has been criticized as being far too large.¹⁰³

It is easy to see why the controversy over whether or not World War II was the deadliest conflict in human history is important for Pinker's thesis.

So, while one metric of lethality provides strong support for Pinker's thesis, the more standard metric appears to undermine it.

The question of which is the most appropriate measure for determining the lethality of periods of warfare remains contested, not least because the different metrics are used for quite different analytic, moral, and advocacy purposes.

However, it is not difficult to see why the debate over whether or not World War II was the deadliest conflict in human history is important. If true, then the central thesis of *Better Angels*—that there has been a millennia-long *decline* in wartime violence—would appear to be fatally undermined.

Or would it?

First, note that Pinker's suggestion that World War II—and the twentieth century more generally—was relatively much less violent than previous wars and eras is quite strongly qualified. He certainly argues that there are good reasons to believe that “the bloodiest-century factoid is an illusion,”¹⁰⁴ but he is also careful to point out that this is far from certain:

The truth is that we will never really know ... *it's hard enough to pin down death tolls in the 20th century, let alone earlier ones.*¹⁰⁵

Second, *Better Angels* raises the possibility that the extraordinary death toll of World War II may be an outlier—a hugely violent, but short-term, deviation from a long-term trend towards a less-violent world—“a last gasp in a long slide of major war into historical obsolescence.”¹⁰⁶

Because outliers are almost by definition unpredictable, we cannot rule out future paroxysms of lethal violence, similar to World War II or the Rwandan genocide, even if the *long-term* underlying trend in the reduction in the deadliness of warfare continues.

Third, war is only one cause of lethal violence. So, even if World War II was the deadliest war in human history, as critics of *Better Angels* claim, it still does not follow that lethal violence *overall* has increased. It is possible

We cannot rule out future paroxysms of lethal violence, similar to World War II or Rwanda.

that over the centuries, homicide rates have decreased at a higher rate than war death rates have *increased*.

Here, too, the logic of Pinker's thesis, plus the fragmentary data he cites on the dramatically high levels of lethal violence in non-state societies, suggest that average homicide rates in what is now called the developing world likely declined substantially following the transition to state-based societies and the increasing restraints on violence that were associated with the consolidation of state control.

Critics charge that Pinker's data not only contain errors but are also unrepresentative of non-state societies.

While governance by states has been highly repressive in some places and remains extremely weak in others, it appears, on balance, to be far more effective at minimizing violence than the weak social controls of anarchic non-state societies.

Better Angels finds that the *average* homicide rate among the pre-pacification non-state societies on which data have been collated was substantially in excess of 500 deaths per 100,000 of the population per year.¹⁰⁷ It is not possible to have a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of such figures given the paucity of reliable data. But the average of 500-plus deaths per 100,000 rate is dramatically greater than the UN estimate of the average global homicide rate in 2010—i.e., 6.9 homicides per 100,000 of the world's population per year.¹⁰⁸

And, as we point out in Chapter 2, even in the two regions worst affected by homicides today—the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa—the current homicide rate is estimated at less than 20 per 100,000 per population.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the average homicide rate for early non-state societies collated by Pinker is more than *five times higher* than the highest-recorded homicide rate in any country in the world in 2010.¹¹⁰ So, data on non-state societies would have to be dramatically wrong for the declinist thesis to be invalidated.

Does Better Angels Get It Wrong about the Extent of Violence in Early Human Societies?

We noted earlier that critics had argued not only that Pinker underestimated the deadliness of the twentieth century but also that the data he draws on from early human societies greatly exaggerate the deadliness of non-state warfare. The critics, mostly anthropologists, charge that the data that Pinker uses not only contain errors but are unrepresentative of non-state societies more generally—particularly the earliest hunter-gatherer societies.

In early 2013 a new multi-author study, *War, Peace, and Human Nature*, was published by Oxford University Press. Edited by Douglas Fry, it contains chapters by Fry and Brian Ferguson that offer detailed critiques of the data that Pinker draws on in his examination of war death rates in non-state societies.¹¹¹ Ferguson found fault with individual cases; Fry's concern was much broader. In what he has described

elsewhere as “Pinker’s Big Lie,”¹¹² he argues that *Better Angels* ignores the critical fact that “[t]he worldwide archaeological evidence shows that *war was simply absent over the vast majority of human existence.*”¹¹³

If true, this might seem to be a rather damning indictment, but the “vast majority of human existence” to which Fry refers is the period that stretches *backwards* from circa 10,000 BCE for more than 100,000 years to the earliest evolution of *Homo sapiens*. It is this period that Fry insists was essentially free from warfare. *Better Angels*, however, focuses on the period *after* 10,000 BCE.

It is possible that warfare was extremely rare between the small foraging societies in the millennia before 10,000 BCE that are the focus of Fry’s concern. But evidence for this thesis is based on data that are even more fragmentary than the studies on which Pinker relies. Given these data limitations, the claim that there are very few cases of nomadic hunter-gatherer warfare prior to 10,000 BCE is open to the obvious caveat that the absence of evidence of warfare in this period is not the same as evidence of absence.

But even if Fry were correct, it is far from clear that this constitutes a serious critique of the main thesis of *Better Angels*. Pinker assumes a continuous decline in violence throughout human history. Fry, however, argues that the trajectory of violence has followed an “n-shaped” curve: after the peaceful past of foraging societies, violence increased with the emergence of first settled, agricultural communities around 10,000 BCE and then started to decline again in more recent millennia. The latter period is the main focus of Pinker’s study and here his analysis is essentially in agreement with Fry’s.

In fact, both Fry and Pinker agree that non-state societies post-10,000 BCE had high wartime death rates and that these rates declined with the growth and consolidation of political institutions and state systems that had an effective monopoly over the use of force. Indeed, in reviewing *Better Angels* for *BookForum*, Fry notes, “Pinker’s basic claim is itself largely on target: Physical violence has been decreasing over recent millennia.”¹¹⁴

There is little evidence of nomadic hunter-gatherer warfare pre-10,000 BCE, but the absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence.

And both Fry and Pinker share the conviction that, as Fry argued in a book published in 2007, “warfare is not inevitable and ... humans have a substantial capacity for dealing with conflicts non-violently.” There are ways to move beyond war.¹¹⁵

The latter is, of course, precisely the focus of *Better Angels*.

Critiquing Better Angels’ Explanations for the Decline in Violence

Critics familiar with the statistical data that Pinker and other “declinists” draw on have tended to accept the claim that violence—particularly the number and deadliness of wars—has declined in recent centuries. But they have challenged some of the arguments that

Pinker and other declinist researchers have used in seeking to explain *why* the decline has taken place.

Thus, Bradley Thayer, writing in a special issue on the decline of war in *International Studies Review*, advances two reasons for skepticism about Pinker's broad explanatory framework. Like other realist scholars, he focuses on international wars, "First, 'the better angels' are unequally distributed in the world and certainly do not rule outside of the West; and second, they do not fully rule, even in the West."¹¹⁶

Thayer agrees with Pinker that there has been "a dramatic decline in violence,"¹¹⁷ and he does not dispute Pinker's argument that trends in warfare are an outcome of the tension between the "better angels" and "inner demons" of human nature. When circumstances allow "better angels" to prevail over "inner demons," violence declines.

Second, Thayer maintains that "better angels" are missing throughout much of the developing world—and this indeed is where most wars since the end of World War II have taken place.

But Thayer misses the point here. He argues that the peace-facilitating "better angels" do not rule in the developing world, yet it is precisely in these regions that the deadliness of interstate wars has shrunk dramatically since the early 1950s, and where the number of civil wars has declined substantially since the end of the Cold War.

Since the end of WWII the US has fought more international conflicts than any other country bar two former colonial powers—the UK and France.

In addition, Thayer critiques declinist theories for paying insufficient attention to what he argues is the critical security-enhancing role played by the US in the international system since the end of World War II. It is, however, far from self-evident that America's international role *has* enhanced global security in this period.

The US has fought more international conflicts than any other country bar the UK and France since the end of World War II. This includes conflicts with other states, as well as the numerous "proxy wars" in which the US was directly and indirectly involved during the Cold War. In these wars, the US was seeking not to stop wars but to win them. Its central mission was combatting communism, not preventing war.

Realists can always respond to such criticisms by positing a counterfactual argument—i.e., that there would have been even more violence worldwide absent Washington's stabilizing influence during the Cold War. Such forms of argumentation are, however, purely speculative.

Thayer goes on to argue that the benign hegemonic role played by the US, with its concomitant enhancement in global security, is threatened by the rise of China. There is no doubt, he says, "that China's rise in relative power contains great risks of conflict and intense security competition."¹¹⁸

While many realist analysts share Thayer's concerns about future military challenges to the US from China, few ask what conceivable interest Beijing would have in provoking an international conflict with a military superpower whose war-waging capacities still massively exceed China's. Increasingly enmeshed in the global economic system, and with the second-largest GDP (gross domestic product) in the world, China has a strong vested interest in sustaining the international status quo, not disrupting it.

There is no doubt that China seeks to maximize its influence in the international system. Like other great powers it does so ruthlessly.

It is quite true that China seeks to maximize its influence in the world and, like other great powers, often does so ruthlessly. But in doing so, it relies primarily on its massive economic leverage and related political power, not military force.¹¹⁹ It is no accident that more than 30 years have passed since Beijing last fought a war.

It is possible, of course, that Thayer and other realists are correct and that at some point in the future the political dynamics of the rise of China, coupled with the (relative) decline of the US, will generate increasing instability and that security crises will again plunge the world into the horrors of industrial-scale interstate war.

But even if this somewhat unlikely scenario were to become a reality, it would in no sense undermine the central thesis of *Better Angels*, which is that an extraordinary and little-recognized global decline in violence has taken place—and to explain why this is the case. Pinker's focus is on violence *in the past*; he does not claim that there will be no or fewer major upsurges of violence in the future. "The truth is," he writes, "I don't know what will happen across the entire world in the coming decades, and neither does anyone else."¹²⁰

In the same *International Studies Review* issue, Jack Levy and William Thompson affirm that they, too, have no quarrel with claims about the declining frequency of warfare over time. But they criticize some of the theoretical arguments advanced to explain these trends.¹²¹ Their critique also derives from realist assumptions about the causes of war in the international system. With respect to the declining trends in warfare, they argue that Pinker's thesis,

Levy and Thompson argue that Pinker's thesis underestimates the weight of material factors and overplays the importance of culture and ideational factors.

"overestimates the role of cultural and ideational factors. It underestimates both the weight of material and institutional factors and the extent to which culture and attitudes are endogenous to them."¹²²

This critique deserves serious attention since Pinker draws heavily on Levy's work for his Long Peace chapter, particularly Levy's findings on trends in great-power warfare from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

Like most realists, Levy and Thompson are skeptical about *ideational* factors—i.e., the role of norms and ideas—as determinants of trends in warfare. But they provide neither data nor compelling arguments to support their skepticism.

Better Angels has relatively little to say about realist theories other than to note that the end of the East/West bipolar balance that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union did not lead to the instability predicted by many realist thinkers.

As noted earlier, there is no doubt that realist policies that stress “peace through strength,” power-balancing, and deterrence work in some contexts. But in others they can lead to *conflict spirals*,¹²³ arms races and inadvertent wars that none of the warring parties originally intended.

Seeking a unified theory of violent behaviour makes little more sense than seeking a unified theory of quick behaviour.

Realist theories fit into Pinker's category of “important but inconsistent” explanations for trends in warfare, of which he notes, “It's not that these forces are by any means minor,

it's just that they have *not consistently worked to reduce violence*.”¹²⁴

Central to Pinker's thesis, as we noted earlier, is the idea that his five historical forces—the state monopoly of violence, gentle commerce, feminization, cosmopolitanism, and the escalator of reason—have, unlike realist policies, been steadily expanding and have worked *consistently* to reduce the incidence and deadliness of violence.

Levy and Thompson also criticize what they see as Pinker's attempt to create “a unified theory of violence”:

We fear that any theory broad enough to explain violence at the levels of the individual, family, neighborhood, communal group, state, and international system would be too general and too indiscriminating to capture variations in violence within each level, which is a prerequisite for any theoretical explanation.¹²⁵

We agree.

Social philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre once argued that seeking a unified theory of violent behaviour makes no more sense than seeking a single explanation for quick behaviour.¹²⁶ The latter quest would strike us as silly because we know people do things quickly for an infinite number of different reasons. MacIntyre's point is that this is also true of violent behaviour.

But Pinker does *not* claim to be offering a unified theory of violence. Rather, he has created a complex explanatory framework that embraces many different theoretical perspectives and seeks to identify the violence-reducing forces at play in the Pacification

Process, the Civilizing Process, the Humanitarian Revolution, the Long Peace, the New Peace, and the Rights Revolution.¹²⁷

But he is also very clear that “we should not expect these forces to fall out of a *grand unified theory*.”¹²⁸ So, while we share Levy and Thompson’s skepticism about the possibilities of a single unified theory of violence, so, too, it would seem, does Pinker.

Better Angels draws on an extraordinary range of academic disciplines—political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology, archaeology, and history, plus a wide range of methodologies—to present a multiplicity of interrelated arguments that seek to explain why violence has declined.

The large number of causal mechanisms that Pinker invokes to explain the decline of violence raises an interesting question: can the declinist thesis be falsified?

The basic empirical question, “Has violence declined?” can—in principle—clearly be falsified. If we had robust data going back millennia, many of the factual uncertainties that are fodder for current controversies would today be resolved. (Important normative questions, such as those raised by Robert Jervis and others that were noted earlier, cannot, of course, be resolved simply with access to more and better data.)

A greater intellectual challenge lies in determining whether or not the explanations in *Better Angels* for the putative decline are falsifiable. In making his case, Pinker relies, as we have seen, on a wide range of explanatory mechanisms that embrace agency, contingency, proximate causes, and long-term deep-lying ideational and socio-cultural transitions. Indeed, as Pinker points out, *Better Angels*’ explanatory framework includes “six trends, five inner demons, four better angels, and five historical forces.”¹²⁹

The fact that many of the drivers of the decline in violence are interrelated raises the issue of causal *over-determination*—here meaning that the decline in violence has multiple causes, any one of which may be sufficient on its own to determine the downward trend. Over-determination makes it difficult to understand the weight of different causal variables.

Take the case of the Long Peace that has variously been attributed to:

- Widespread revulsion against the mass slaughter of industrial-scale conventional warfare in World War II and the consequent popular and elite determination to avoid great-power wars in future.
- The deterrent power of nuclear weapons—whose killing power is so great as to make war between the nuclear weapons states or their allies mutually suicidal and therefore irrational.
- The emergence, in the wake of World War II, of the universal norm that proscribes states from going to war against each other except in self-defence, or with the authority

If we had robust data going back millennia, many of the factual uncertainties and controversies about trends in global violence would today be resolved.

of the UN Security Council. Like all norms, this one is transgressed, but it remains a major constraint on interstate violence.

- Globalization and the resulting increase in economic and other forms of interdependence that have increased the costs of interstate war and reduced their benefits.

Demonstrating that any one of these explanatory mechanisms has no causal impact would not undermine the Long Peace thesis. This would only happen if all the other mechanisms could be demonstrated to have no impact as well. But this is extraordinarily difficult.

In econometric analysis it is possible *in principle* to determine the impact of a single causal factor by controlling for the impact of other factors. In practice, the quantitative data in war-prone and war-affected states are rarely sufficient or reliable enough to permit this.

This challenge to the declinist thesis cannot easily be dismissed. But it is important to remember that the fact that Pinker's explanatory framework may be extraordinarily difficult to falsify does not mean that it is wrong.

Other Challenges to Better Angels

Many critics of the declinist thesis have argued that the concepts of violence that Pinker, Goldstein, and HSRP rely on are too narrow. They object, for example, to the omission of *structural violence*, a term used to describe the negative health consequences of structural

A study by the Peace Research Institute, Oslo, found that some 18 million people died around the world as a consequence of inequality in 1970.

inequities in socio-economic systems that have the effect of denying the poor access to adequate health care, nutrition, or shelter.¹³⁰

It is certainly true that socio-economic inequalities associated with structural violence¹³¹ cause a far greater number of deaths among poor people worldwide than does physical violence. One study from PRIO found that some 18 million people died prematurely around the world as a consequence

of inequality in 1970.¹³² The estimated worldwide number of battle deaths from armed conflict in the same year was less than 300,000.¹³³

There are, of course, many forms of somatic harm that afflict people that Pinker, Goldstein, HSRP, and other declinist researchers do not examine, but it is far from clear how relabelling them as "violence" serves any useful analytic or moral purpose. Pinker, who discusses some of these harms, notes, "It's not that these aren't bad things, but you can't write a coherent book on the topic of 'bad things.'"¹³⁴

Here, and in many other cases, critics are attacking declinist researchers for not doing what they never sought to do in the first place.

Better Angels has also been repeatedly attacked for failing to deal with issues that it *does*, in fact, address in depth. Thus, in the much-cited *New Yorker* review of *Better Angels*, noted earlier, Elizabeth Kolbert claims that "Pinker is virtually silent about Europe's bloody colonial

adventures."¹³⁵ In fact, the book does discuss colonial conquests, wars, enslavements, and genocides. As Pinker points out, his list of the "21 worst atrocities in history ... includes the 'Annihilation of the American Indians,' the 'Atlantic Slave Trade,' 'British India,' and the 'Congo Free State.'"¹³⁶ So, it is unclear how any serious review could come to the conclusion that the book ignores colonialism.

In another long review, Edward S. Herman and David Peterson argue that:

Whereas in Pinker's view there has been a "Long Peace" since the end of the Second World War, in the real world there has been a series of long and devastating U.S. wars: in the Koreas (1950–1953), Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (1954–1975), Iraq (1990–), Afghanistan (2001– or, arguably, 1979–), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1996–), with the heavy direct involvement of U.S. clients from Rwanda (Paul Kagame) and Uganda (Yoweri Museveni) in large-scale Congo killings; and Israel's outbursts in Lebanon (1982 and 2006), to name a few. There were also very deadly wars in Iran, invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq (1980–1988), with Western encouragement and support.¹³⁷

This is disingenuous. Herman and Peterson must know that in no sense can their long list of bloody wars fought since the end of World War II support an argument against the Long Peace thesis. The focus of the latter is not the absence of *all* wars, or even large wars, but of wars *between the great powers*.¹³⁸

Given that the great powers had fought each other savagely and repeatedly for centuries, and given that their last major encounter killed some 50 million people, the fact that we have had 60-plus years without another paroxysm of great-power bloodletting represents a remarkable change in the global security environment. It is, moreover, part of an extraordinary decline in *all* forms of international warfare—one that includes anti-colonial conflicts and wars fought by minor and middle powers, as well as those fought by the great powers. As the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* pointed out: "In the 1950s there were on average between six and seven international conflicts being fought around the world each year; in the new millennium the average has been less than one."¹³⁹

Here it is also worth pointing out that the interstate conflicts that have become extremely rare today are, on average, vastly more deadly than the civil wars that increased in number until the end of the Cold War. All of these facts are clearly laid out in *Better Angels* and the various *Human Security Report* publications that Herman and Peterson cite repeatedly.

John Gray, in another much-cited review, argues that Pinker's thesis fails because it ignores the fact that, "in much the same way that rich societies exported their pollution to developing countries, the societies of the highly-developed world exported their conflicts."¹⁴⁰

In so far as this is a reference to Cold War proxy wars—and it is difficult to see what else it could refer to—these are, of course, examined in *Better Angels*. But they ended with the

end of the Cold War. The end of East/West security competition was in turn a major driver of what Pinker calls the New Peace, which has seen a two-decade reversal of the increase in civil wars that had been underway during the 1950s. By 2011 there were half as many civil wars as there were at the end of the Cold War.

Part of the problem here is that the critics either do not engage with, or fail to understand, the statistical data that provide the evidence for the declinist thesis. Many focus on selected cases of recent wars and atrocities, presenting these cases in such a way as to suggest that it is not only wrong but also morally inappropriate to claim that worldwide violence has declined. Thus, Elizabeth Kolbert starts her review of *Better Angels* with a long description of the shocking massacre perpetrated by Norwegian fascist Anders Breivik on the island of Utøya in July 2011. Breivik shot to death 69 young people on the island and killed another eight with explosives in Oslo. Some 200 sustained injuries. Kolbert's review concludes by referring back to Breivik's killing spree. "Hate and madness haven't disappeared," she says, "and they aren't going to."¹⁴¹

This is quite true, but although clearly intended to be critical of the central message of *Better Angels*, Kolbert misses the point. Neither Pinker—nor any other scholar working in this field—has ever given the slightest hint that they believe violence has disappeared or that it will. The declinist position is not that violence has ended, or even that it will continue to decline, but simply that it has declined. No more, no less.

Looking Ahead

Data from recent centuries, and the fragmentary evidence we have from the distant past, strongly suggest that there has been an uneven but substantial decline in wars, homicides, and other forms of violence over numerous millennia. But this, of course, is no guarantee that the decline will continue into the future.

Realists who believe that war is an inevitable consequence of struggles for power between states in an essentially anarchical world system are naturally skeptical about the claims that the world is becoming more peaceful. Levy and Thompson, for example, note that in 1912 observers of European security could have looked back a hundred years and also celebrated a Long Peace:

This was the longest period of great power peace in the last four centuries of the modern European system. The median number of battle deaths continued to decline, and the four great power wars that had occurred since the Congress of Vienna averaged less than a year in duration, far shorter than those in earlier centuries (or the subsequent one) ... The frequency of civil wars had dropped by fifty percent in the previous four decades.

In terms of quantitative trends in war, then, our counterparts in 1912 had even more grounds for optimism about the prospects for peace than we do today.¹⁴²

This “Long Peace,” of course, came to an abrupt end just two years after 1912 when Europe descended into the mindless slaughter of the First World War. A quarter of a century later, World War II claimed some 50 million lives in a six-year war that spanned six continents.

Levy and Thompson usefully remind us that a relatively peaceful recent past is no guarantee of a relatively peaceful near-term future.

But the circumstances of the Long Peace of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are very different from those of the nineteenth century. In the twenty-first century, the constraints on major powers resorting to war are *far* stronger than they were in the nineteenth and for reasons already canvassed in this review.

First, there was no strong normative restraint against resorting to cross-border warfare in the nineteenth century comparable to the norm against interstate war that has increasingly prevailed since the end of World War II. War in the nineteenth century was simply a normal instrument of statecraft and its use attracted neither moral opprobrium nor international sanction. Today war is illegal except in self-defence, or with the authority of the UN Security Council.

Second, the armies of the nineteenth century lacked the massive destructive conventional weapons systems that wrought such havoc in World War II—to say nothing of nuclear weapons. This fact, plus the increasingly integrated structure of the post-World War II world, has made resort to major international war far more costly than was the case in the nineteenth century—for winners as well as losers.

Third, the nineteenth century had nothing remotely comparable to the international security architecture that emerged in the wake of the end of the Cold War and whose central rationale is conflict prevention, peacemaking (stopping ongoing wars), and peacebuilding (preventing wars that have stopped from starting again). This system of global security governance comprises a loose but ever-expanding network of international organizations, donor and other governments, informal clusters of like-minded states, think-tanks, and large numbers of national and international NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

This system is inefficient, poorly coordinated, disputatious, underfunded, and prone to tragic error, but it has nevertheless played a critically important role in the reduction of conflicts, particularly civil wars, since the end of the Cold War. There is no indication that the international community’s commitment to peacemaking and peacebuilding is likely to wane. Indeed, it is continuing to increase both in terms of resources committed and new initiatives launched. But much of this increase has passed unnoticed. It is a safe bet, for example, that very few people today realize that more than 50 new peace operations have been launched in Africa since 2000, 10 of them since 2011.¹⁴³

One should not forget that relatively peaceful recent past is no guarantee of a relatively peaceful near-term future.

Fourth, the end of colonialism and the Cold War removed two of the major drivers of war from the international system. Neither will return.

Fifth, the structural determinants of peace in the developing world appear to be steadily growing. For example, the rise in per capita income that is apparent in most poor countries is associated with increased state capacity. High GDP and state capacity, as almost all the statistical studies affirm, are the strongest determinants of reduced risks of civil wars.

A recent statistical study by Norwegian researchers at PRIO found that, on current trends, the structural determinants of peace are likely to lead to further reductions in armed conflict around the world. The PRIO team's statistical model projected conflict trends from 2010 to 2050 and found that there would be, "a continued decline in the proportion of the world's countries that have internal armed conflict, from about 15 percent in 2009 to 7 percent in 2050."¹⁴⁴

The prediction that the percentage of countries in conflict will decline by more than half over the next 40 years assumes that the future conflict trends will be determined by the same drivers as those of the recent past. But the PRIO researchers caution that:

Predictions are necessarily uncertain. They depend on a sound statistical model of what determines conflict, accurate forecasts for the predictors, and are never able to account for entirely random events nor great systemic shifts such as the end of the Cold War.¹⁴⁵

What then might the PRIO model fail to predict? Several possibilities immediately come to mind: outbreaks of nuclear terrorism, a huge cross-national upsurge of Islamist violence, or wars triggered by the massive disruptions caused by climate change.

All three possible catastrophes are discussed in *Better Angels*. In each case, Pinker notes reasons for concern but also offers reasons for skepticism about the more dire predictions of the conflict pessimists.

He goes on to remind readers that millions of people are alive today because of the wars and genocides that *did not* take place:

The conditions that favoured this happy outcome—democracy, prosperity, decent government, peacekeeping, open economies, and the decline of anti-human ideologies—are not, of course, guaranteed to last forever. But nor are they likely to vanish overnight.¹⁴⁶

Joshua Goldstein strikes a more upbeat note in the concluding sentences of his *Winning the War on War*: "We have avoided nuclear wars, left behind world war, nearly extinguished interstate war, and reduced civil wars to fewer countries with fewer casualties. We are almost there."¹⁴⁷

In sum, there are ample grounds for cautious optimism but absolutely none for complacency.



Kts / Dreamstime.

CHAPTER 2

War, Criminal Violence, and Human Security: Unpacking the Puzzles

Over the last decade, claims that the number and deadliness of armed conflict has declined since the end of the Cold War—while not uncontested¹⁴⁸—have become increasingly accepted. The most telling finding is that the number of *high-intensity state-based conflicts*—those that kill a thousand or more people a year—has declined by more than half since 1989. Chapter 1 provided an overview of recent contributions to this debate.

But while large-scale organized *political* violence has declined over the past quarter of a century, some analysts argue that organized—and often transnational—*criminal* violence has increased.¹⁴⁹ In fact, death rates in some countries exceed those in the deadliest wars currently being waged around the world.

As Steven Zyck and Robert Muggah have argued:

*The growing scale and significance of chronic organised criminal violence, often sustained by trans-national crime networks, has recently raised new challenges about the definition of what constitutes armed conflict and to what extent this can be clearly differentiated from certain forms of criminality.*¹⁵⁰

If, in fact, organized criminal violence has been increasing rapidly, this has sobering implications for human security. And if, as some data suggest,¹⁵¹ it is not just the rates of homicides from *organized* crime that are increasing worldwide but the rates of *all* homicides, this could be seen as posing a challenge to the central thesis of *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Steven Pinker's analysis of the millennia-long decline in all forms of violence.¹⁵²

Organized Crime: The Globalization Connection

Underpinning much of the recent concern about the rise in organized criminal violence is the belief that it has been facilitated—in some cases driven—by the same forces that have driven the inexorable rise of economic globalization.

Introducing a major 2010 UN (United Nations) report on *The Globalization of Crime*, Antonio Maria Costa, the then-executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), argued that organized crime “has diversified, gone global and reached macro-economic proportions.”¹⁵³

This, he argued, was directly related to the impact of globalization:

[The] unprecedented openness in trade, finance, travel and communication has created economic growth and well-being, and it has also given rise to massive opportunities for criminals to make their business prosper.¹⁵⁴

Increased transnational organized criminal activity, which includes crimes such as narco-trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, or piracy, impacts human security because it is strongly associated with organized violence.

Harvard University’s Jeffrey Miron argues this is no accident. Because buyers and sellers of illicit goods cannot resolve their disputes with lawsuits or arbitration, they resort to violence to achieve their goals.

This phenomenon is most obvious with respect to the so-called drug wars but is also evident with respect to other illegal goods and services:

Violence was common in the alcohol industry when it was banned during Prohibition, but not before or after. Violence is the norm in illicit gambling markets but not in legal ones. Violence is routine when prostitution is banned but not when it’s permitted. Violence results from policies that create black markets, not from the characteristics of the good or activity in question.¹⁵⁵

The rise of transnational organized crime is part of what has aptly been described as “the dark side of globalization.”¹⁵⁶ But the increase in global trade, investment, and other forms of transnational economic integration has also been associated with increased levels of human development. The latter are, in turn, associated with *declining* homicide rates in most regions of the world.

In other words, the effects of globalization can be associated with both increases and decreases in the incidence of transnational organized crime.

Violence is the norm in illicit gambling markets around the world but not where it is legalized.

Organized crime has increased, diversified, gone global and reached macro-economic proportions.

As we point out later in this chapter, the global data on the violence perpetrated are sparse and unreliable. So, it is difficult, if not impossible, at present to determine what the overall impact of globalization is on the incidence of organized criminal violence.

Drug Wars in Mexico and Central America

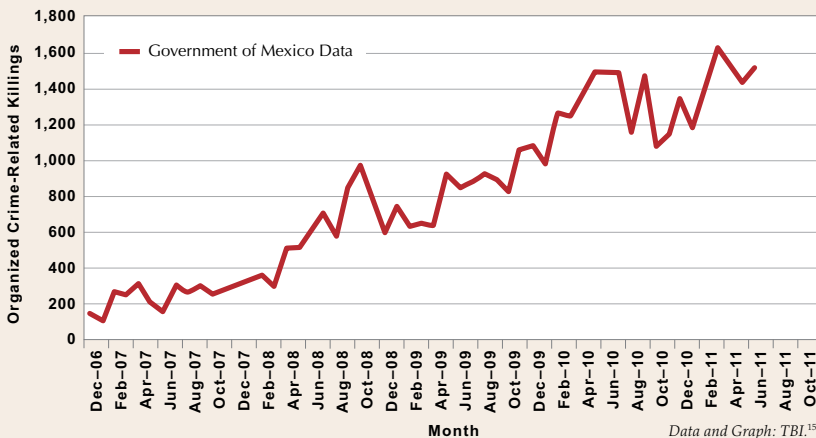
There is ample room for debate about the causes and consequences of organized criminal violence, but—as this chapter demonstrates—there can be no doubt about its lethal impact in some regions of the world. This is nowhere more evident than in Mexico and Central America.

Mexico's drug-related homicide numbers have risen dramatically since 2006. A recent report from the United States Army War College offered this graphic description of the violence:

Areas of Mexico have deteriorated into blood-drenched killing fields as President Felipe Calderón, who took office on December 1, 2006, pursues warfare against eight or more deadly cartels, along with the gangs of young hoodlums who either cooperate with these crime syndicates or wreak mayhem on their own. Depictions of decapitations, castrations, brutal beatings, and other forms of torture garner newspaper headlines and lead stories on radio and television news reports.¹⁵⁷

The majority of the recent violence in Mexico has been the result of fighting between drug traffickers and other organized crime groups. Mexico has been affected by drug cartel violence for many years, but deadly violence did not escalate until 2006 when the government launched a military offensive that dispatched 6,500 troops in an attempt to quell cartel violence.¹⁵⁸

Figure 2.1 Monthly Death Tolls from Organized Crime-Related Killings in Mexico, 2006–2011

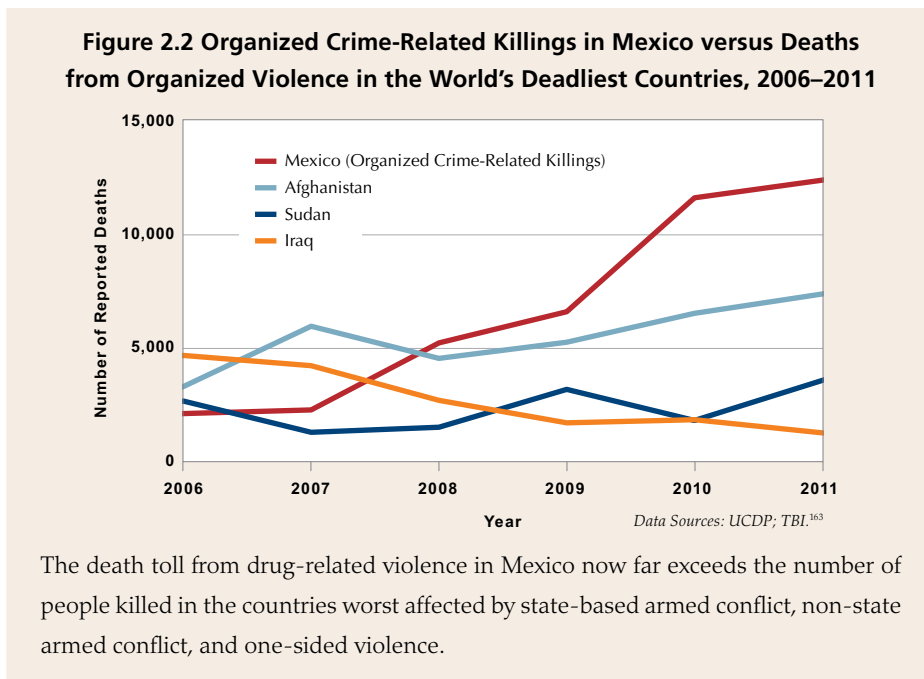


Mexico has seen a dramatic rise in killings related to ongoing drug violence since 2006. The deaths have resulted from fighting between cartels involved in the narcotics trade and from their confrontations with government forces.

Data provided by the University of San Diego's Trans-Border Institute (TBI), which are based on Mexican government figures, show that from the end of 2006 to the end of 2011, more than 50,000 individuals are estimated to have been killed by drug-related violence in Mexico.¹⁶⁰

The trend data displayed in Figure 2.1 indicate a dramatic increase in organized crime-related killings since 2006. In its latest report, TBI notes that in 2012 things may have improved: "Depending on the data source, violence either levelled off or declined somewhat in 2012."¹⁶¹

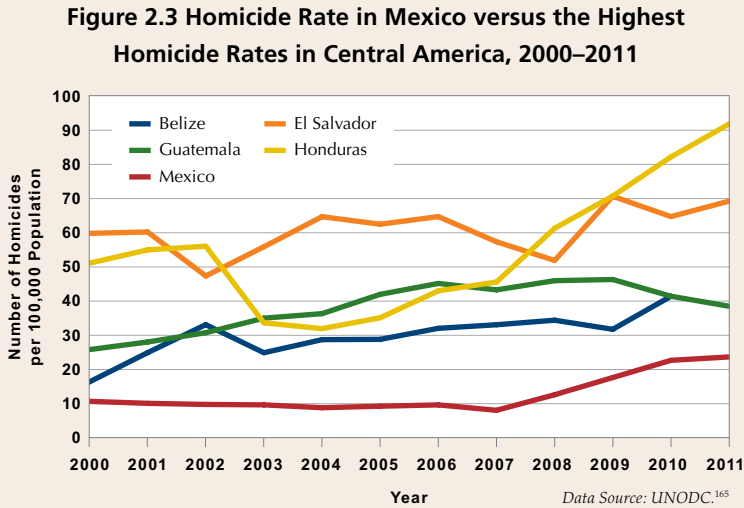
Figure 2.2 shows that the almost 13,000 deaths from organized crime in Mexico in 2011 were greater than the 2011 battle-death tolls in any of the three countries worst affected by armed conflict and violence against civilians between 2006 and 2011—Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan.¹⁶²



Note that the trend data for Mexico (the red trend line in Figure 2.2) are not for *all* homicides but only for the organized crime-related killings that make up some 45 to 60 percent¹⁶⁴ of Mexico's total homicide toll. So, the comparison is between organized *criminal* violence in Mexico and organized *political* violence in the other countries. This is the most appropriate comparison.

Somewhat surprisingly, given Mexico's huge absolute death toll, the national homicide *rate*—i.e., the number of individuals per 100,000 of the population that are killed each year—is actually much *lower* than that in four other Central American countries affected by drug-related violence.

Figure 2.3 shows homicide rates for Belize, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras. Despite its huge death toll, Mexico's homicide rate of 24 deaths per 100,000 of the population is the lowest in the group. In 2011 the overall homicide rate in Honduras—92 deaths per 100,000 of the population—was almost *four times* higher than the overall homicide rate in Mexico.



Despite the shocking number of killings in Mexico, the situation in other Central American countries is even worse. Homicide rates per population in Honduras and El Salvador are between three and four times higher.

To put these figures into perspective, the average worldwide homicide rate is just 7.9 per 100,000 of the population according to the 2011 *Global Burden of Armed Violence (GBAV)*.¹⁶⁶ This amounts to just a third of the Mexican homicide rate and less than a tenth of the rate in Honduras.

The homicide data shown in Figure 2.3 do not distinguish between deaths related to organized crime and all other homicides. But there is little doubt that their extraordinarily high—and in most cases rising—homicide tolls have been driven by organized crime-related violence. Indeed, as UNODC has pointed out, drug trafficking is “the root cause of the surge in homicides in Central America in recent years.”¹⁶⁷

Figure 2.3 shows that in the five Central American countries that are among the most notorious for drug violence, homicide rates are very high and have all increased, dramatically in some cases.

The high and rising death rates from organized violence in these countries are significant because, as Steven Pinker has argued,¹⁶⁸ rates of killing, typically expressed as deaths per 100,000 of the population per year, are more appropriate metrics for estimating the comparative societal impact of deadly violence than absolute numbers of fatalities.

It is a country's homicide *rate*, not its absolute *toll*, that better reflects the average risk of a citizen being killed violently. So, while Mexico has almost four times as many murder victims overall as Honduras, the probability of being murdered in the latter country in 2011 was nearly four times greater than in Mexico.

For UNODC, Interpol, criminologists, justice ministries, and police departments, annual fatality rates per 100,000 of the population are the preferred metric. But few non-specialists would have any idea whether 30 homicides per 100,000 of the population per year represent a high or a low violent fatality rate. So, the shockingly high absolute number of homicides from drug-related violence in Mexico gets huge coverage in the media, while the relatively much graver situation in Honduras—where the homicide *rate* is some four times higher than Mexico's—receives relatively little attention.

And comparisons between fatality rates from organized political and criminal violence can be equally surprising. As the 2011 *GBAV* report found, "in an average year between 2004 and 2009, more people per capita were killed in El Salvador than in Iraq."¹⁶⁹

Conflict researchers, defence ministries, military spokespersons, and the media, on the other hand, typically use absolute numbers of battle-death fatalities as their preferred metric when referring to deadly organized violence. These provide accessible and useful insights into human costs of conflict. But they are a less appropriate metric for making international comparisons of the human costs of that violence than death rates per 100,000 of the population per year.

The fact that those who focus on organized criminal violence use different metrics from those who specialize in military security has meant that comparing the relative deadliness of the two forms of organized violence has rarely been attempted.

Whatever the advantages and disadvantages of the different metrics, it is clear from a human security perspective it is of little consequence whether death tolls are caused by organized political or organized criminal violence—not least because much organized violence is actually an amalgam of both.

Organized Criminal and Political Violence: A Distinction without a Difference?

The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey (SAS), which in 2008 and 2011 played the key role in creating the major *GBAV* reports, has laid down a pointed challenge to the "silos" mentality that compartmentalizes organized violence into two exclusive categories—"criminal" and "political." The SAS researchers argue that the distinction between the two categories is often artificial and stands in the way of a comprehensive understanding of the true human costs of organized armed violence.

The 2011 *GBAV* report noted that organized criminal groups:

have shown an extraordinary capacity for blurring the boundaries between criminal and political types of violence, as evidenced by the drug wars in Mexico and the rest of Central America, the Caribbean, and certain Andean countries.¹⁷⁰

And while the drug cartel “armies” are locked into lethal battles to control the flow of narcotics in Mexico and elsewhere:

governments in countries across these regions have mobilized their armies to boost a faltering war on drugs. Illicit trafficking of drugs is increasingly recognized as a threat to international, regional, and national security, as well as public safety.¹⁷¹

The reality is that these apparently very different forms of organized violence—criminal and political—have many important commonalities.¹⁷² And both are major causes of death and injury while sowing fear and despair and corroding the social bonds of community.

According to the 2011 *GBAV* report:

In countries ranging from Afghanistan and Yemen to Mexico and Nigeria, the merging of organized criminal violence with armed conflicts of varying intensity *renders a simple binary distinction between “conflict” and “non-conflict” meaningless.*¹⁷³

Given the commonalities between criminal and political forms of organized violence, and the overlap between them, any serious attempt to measure the overall human costs of organized violence should clearly include both.

But while the logic of doing this is compelling, it is also unachievable—at least at the present time. Although UNODC’s dataset *includes* fatalities from organized criminal violence of the type we see in Central America and Mexico, the data do not normally distinguish the homicides that arise from organized criminalized violence from those other forms of homicide.¹⁷⁴

A Conflict Data Program That Can Measure Fatalities from Organized Criminal Violence?

UNODC provides data on homicide statistics from all over the world. Yet, no global dataset collects information specifically on organized criminal violence.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), based at Uppsala University in Sweden, uses the term “organized violence” as a collective noun to describe what its datasets measure.¹⁷⁵ It does not make a distinction between “criminal” and “political” organized violence.

Unlike other datasets in this area, UCDP reports *all* armed conflicts being waged around the world in which 25 or more people are killed in a calendar year. And this dataset, the most comprehensive in the world, is—unlike others—updated annually.

UCDP uses the term “organized violence” rather than “conflict” in large part because one of its three datasets counts fatalities that are *not* caused by *conflict*—i.e., by organized armed groups fighting each other. The *one-sided violence* dataset counts the number of unarmed civilians killed by governments or non-state armed groups. This is clearly a form of *organized violence*, but equally clearly it is not *conflict*, because there is no actual *combat*—the unarmed civilians cannot fight back.

However, although the Uppsala researchers use the term “organized violence,” the dataset, as its name suggests, is primarily oriented towards measuring conflict. UCDP’s stated purpose is to enable “systematic studies of the origins of conflict, conflict dynamics and conflict resolution”¹⁷⁶ at the global level.

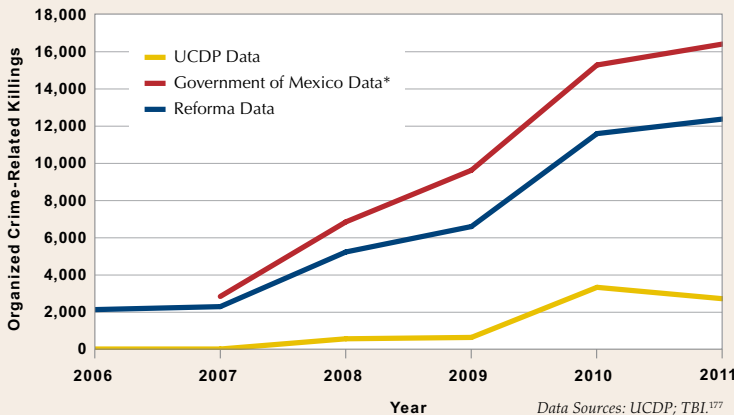
Even though organized crime is closely associated with armed conflict in some countries, it is not the focus of the UCDP datasets.

Uppsala researchers can, in principle, count deaths from all forms of organized violence—including criminal violence. In practice only a relatively small percentage of deaths from organized criminal violence are recorded.

Just how small a percentage becomes very clear when we revisit the data on organized drug violence in Mexico and compare the counts of fatalities collected by the Mexican government with those collected by UCDP’s researchers.

The difference can be clearly seen in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 Trends in Organized Crime-Related Killings in Mexico, 2006–2011



**Note: Data for the last quarter of 2011 were projected by TBI using Reforma data.*

Although UCDP data show a similar trend as other sources, the figures are much lower. For analyzing deaths from organized crime, UCDP recommends using criminal statistics—such as those from the Government of Mexico.

The data displayed in Figure 2.4 show a similar trend: an increase starting in 2008 and slowing down in 2011. Yet, by 2011, the Mexican government’s count of fatalities from organized violence was six times greater than UCDP’s.

Why should there be such an extraordinary difference, given that the Uppsala researchers are well aware of the tens of thousands of violent deaths from organized crime recorded by the government of Mexico?

The answer lies with UCDP’s precise definitions of different types of organized violence, and the coding rules associated with them. These rules—which are oriented towards conflict

rather than organized criminal violence—mean that a very large percentage of the violent deaths in Mexico that the UCDP researchers collect cannot be coded and are therefore not recorded.

UCDP is keenly aware of the challenges involved in measuring organized criminal violence with datasets that were designed to measure organized political violence. The FAQ section of the UCDP website addresses this question in some detail. It notes that:

The UCDP needs to clearly identify the perpetrators of different acts of violence to be able to record them; something which is difficult in a context where the thousands of deaths mainly turn up as dead bodies found in the mornings. This is the case for much of the gang-related fighting that plagues mainly urban areas. *Such violence is extremely difficult to code with the UCDP's method, and those wishing to study it would do better to rely on criminal statistics.*¹⁷⁸

This does *not* mean that UCDP's methodology is incorrect. It simply means that it is designed to measure organized political—not criminal—violence. It does the former task very effectively. Thanks to its definitions and coding rules, the dataset allows us to determine whether, for example, secessionist conflicts are becoming more or less common around the world, whether governments or rebels kill more civilians, and even whether “failed” peace agreements save lives.

This sort of comparative research is rarely possible with the homicide data used by UNODC, since definitions of homicide vary quite markedly from country to country.

Given the similarities, and indeed overlap, between organized criminal and political violence, there is a strong case for counting both—and inter-personal homicides—in order to determine the overall annual burden of deadly armed violence around the world. This is precisely what the *GBAV* research team has done.

As we explain at the end of this chapter, data that distinguish between different types of violence serve a number of important purposes. Yet, global data on the incidence of lethal violence are also needed to determine whether the millennia-long worldwide decline in intentional violence described by Steven Pinker is likely to continue.

Are We Witnessing a Worldwide Increase in Lethal Violence?

Any optimism about the human security benefits of two decades of decline in the number and deadliness of *high-intensity wars*—those with 1,000 or more battle deaths a year—would be severely qualified if organized *criminal* violence was increasing worldwide, as some analysts claim, and as it clearly has done in Mexico and in most countries in Central America.

Unfortunately, there is no way of accurately estimating the global toll of all forms of organized violence. We have reasonably robust annual battle-death data for all countries experiencing organized *political* violence—i.e., armed conflict—around the world since the end of World War II. But there are no comparable fatality data for organized *criminal*

violence. In most countries the latter data are not collected separately from the data for homicides that arise from interpersonal—i.e., unorganized—violence.

However, as we see in the 2011 *GBAV* report, there are global data for *all* homicides—and these, of course, *include* the deaths from organized criminal violence.

In terms of the human costs of violence, it makes little difference whether those who die are victims of war, organized criminal violence, or homicides that result from interpersonal violence.

In terms of the human costs
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criminal violence.

In principle, the homicide data collated from around the world by UNODC—which include homicides from organized criminal violence—could be married with the conflict fatality data from UCDP and other sources to produce a unified count of the worldwide death toll from intentional violence from both wars and homicides.

This is what the 2011 *GBAV* report appears to be doing. In its review of the impact of deadly violence around the world, the *GBAV* research team estimated that there was an annual average of 526,000 violent deaths a year between 2004 and 2009.¹⁷⁹ Of these, just 55,000, some 10 percent of the total, were a direct result of armed conflict.¹⁸⁰ Most violent deaths—75 percent—were the result of intentional homicides.

Unintentional homicides—often referred to as manslaughter—accounted for a further 10 percent of all violent deaths, and what the *GBAV* calls *legal intervention killings*—typically deaths that occur as a result of armed confrontations involving the police—made up 4 percent.¹⁸¹

The *GBAV* database shows that between 2004 and 2009, the non-conflict homicide rate, measured in deaths per 100,000 of the world population, increased by some 5 percent.¹⁸² The global battle-death toll from armed conflict around the world also increased—in 2011 it was almost twice as high as it had been at the historic low point of 2005.

What is the significance of such increases? And do they place a question mark over Steven Pinker's remarkable, though qualified, claim that "we may be living in the most peaceable era in our species' existence"?¹⁸³

The short answer is that while these increases *may* portend a more violent future, they presently pose no challenge to the Pinker thesis. This is so for a number of reasons.

First, and most importantly, both the recent short-term increases in conflict-related battle deaths in the 2000s, and the increase in the global homicide rate noted above, cover far too short a period to warrant *any* generalizations about long-term trends.

Take the case of battle deaths—which include civilians "caught in the crossfire." The Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), has data going back to the end of World War II almost to the present. These reveal that since the beginning of the 1950s, the human cost

of war declined dramatically—from an average of hundreds of thousands of battle deaths a year worldwide to less than 40,000 between 2000 and 2008. Despite the recent increase, the death toll from warfare around the world in the 2000s was far lower than that of the 1950s. The *rate* of killing saw an even larger decline because the world population has increased dramatically since the 1950s, while the number of battle deaths declined.

The decline was very uneven, however, with steep drops in death tolls, followed by sharp increases. These increases—at the beginning of the 1950s, the end of the 1960s, the early 1980s, and the late 1990s—got smaller over time, but each was *far* greater than the very modest and short-lived increases in the worldwide battle death toll in the 2000s.

All these fatality estimations have wide confidence intervals, especially for the first few decades of the post–World War II era, but there can be no doubt about the steep, albeit uneven, overall downward trend. And only trend data can tell us whether things are getting better or worse.

Moreover, as we pointed out in Chapter 4, *The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War*,¹⁸⁴ of the *Human Security Report* published in 2011 there are compelling reasons for believing that the 60-year uneven decline in the deadliness of warfare is not accidental but reflects lasting changes in the international system.

Of course, the fact that *some* changes in the international system have reduced the deadliness of armed conflict—and that their impact will likely be lasting—does *not* mean that other drivers of organized political violence may not arise in the future and reverse the benign trend of the past 60-plus years.

Are Homicides Increasing Worldwide?

As Chapter 1 pointed out, the Pinker thesis about the decline of violence is not simply that *wars* have become much less deadly but that *all* forms of violence have declined, including the homicides that kill far more people than do wars, terrorism, and genocides combined.

As we noted earlier, intentional homicides have increased dramatically in Mexico and much of Central America. There is little doubt that these trends are real because the homicide data for this are relatively robust.

The data for Mexico and Central America raise an obvious question: do the extraordinarily high homicide rates that much of this region is experiencing also characterize other regions of the world where we have less robust data?

Deadly violence is, after all, associated with the production of opium and heroin in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia's "Golden Triangle," and elsewhere, but homicide rates in these areas do not appear to be remotely comparable to those of the drug wars in Mexico and Central America.¹⁸⁵ In no other country are rates remotely as high as the 24 homicides

There is reason to believe that the 60-year uneven decline in the deadliness of warfare is not accidental.

per 100,000 of population in Mexico in 2011—not to mention the extraordinary 92 homicides per 100,000 of population in Honduras.

A UNODC study that examined the small number of countries in Latin America, Asia, and Europe where there are data on fatalities from organized criminal violence found that it was responsible for between 25 and 30 percent of homicides in the Latin American countries,

In sub-Saharan Africa the available data suggest that homicide rates increased from 1990 to 1995.

but only 5 to 10 percent in Asia and less than 5 percent in Europe.¹⁸⁶ Note that the number of countries for which there were data in each region was *very* small and the confidence intervals around the estimates were very large, particularly in Asia and the Americas.

As noted earlier, the 2011 *GBAV* data did reveal a small increase in the worldwide non-conflict homicide rate from 2004 to 2008. But much of the data that underpin this short time series are unreliable—and are certainly far less robust than the data from Latin America.

In a review of global homicide data from 1990 to 2005 undertaken for the World Bank's 2011 *World Development Report*, James Fearon noted that homicide rates had declined in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the West. In North Africa and in the Middle East rates increased from 1990 to 2000, then declined. Latin America was the sole region in which homicide rates had increased from 1990 to 2005. In sub-Saharan Africa the small amount of available data indicate that homicide rates increased from 1990 to 1995, then declined by more than half until 2005.¹⁸⁷

But the Africa data are highly suspect. According to the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, less than one in five sub-Saharan African states has reported homicide data.¹⁸⁸

Most of the data that exist for Africa come from the WHO (World Health Organization). But many of the WHO estimates are not based on actual mortality data, which are rarely available. Rather, they are *modelled*, i.e., statistically inferred using data from other countries—a dubious process.

This methodology has major limitations when it is used to estimate deaths from intentional violence.¹⁸⁹ In fact, as the World Bank has noted, the sub-Saharan African data are too unreliable to be used to establish homicide trends.¹⁹⁰

A 2011 World Bank report argued that sub-Saharan Africa's data are too unreliable to be used to measure trends.

The unreliable nature of the global homicide data means that we cannot be sure of the increase reported by *GBAV*. Its 2011 report found the figures for 2008 and 2009 to be 5 percent higher than for 2004—this incremental change is likely smaller than the measurement error in the data.

But even if we had confidence in the 2004–2009 global trend, such a short time series does not constitute a meaningful trend and is certainly not a reliable guide to what might happen in the future.

Moreover, notwithstanding the very real data uncertainties, there is indirect evidence that suggests that the global trend in homicide rates may be less discouraging than the far-from-robust homicide data suggest.

In 2011 UNODC's *Global Study on Homicide* report pointed out that while there are many and diverse reasons why individuals may resort to deadly violence, there are also very clear associations between the incidence of homicide, on the one hand, and levels of human development and economic inequality, on the other:

Higher levels of homicide are associated with low human and economic development. The largest shares of homicides occur in countries with low levels of human development, and countries with high levels of income inequality are afflicted by homicide rates almost four times higher than more equal societies.¹⁹¹

Examining the association between the leading human development index and homicide rates, the *GBAV's* 2011 report finds that "less developed countries experience more lethal violence than medium- and upper-income countries."¹⁹²

A recent statistical study by criminologist Marc Ouimet found significant correlations between homicide and economic development, inequality, and poverty. The results clearly indicate that wealthier countries experience lower homicide rates, while inequality appears to be more important for predicting higher homicide rates in countries with a medium level of development. Interestingly, the statistical model was unable to account for the variation in homicide rates in countries with a low level of development.¹⁹³ The author points out that one explanation for this non-finding could be that "the homicide rate, as estimated by international agencies, does not represent the reality in these countries,"¹⁹⁴—i.e., that the data for the poorest countries are simply incorrect.

The fact that there is an overall association between levels of economic development and inequality, on the one hand, and homicide rates, on the other, does not *necessarily* tell us anything about causal relationships.¹⁹⁵ But one reason why homicide rates are—on average—lower in countries with higher levels of economic development is likely that governments in these countries have more resources to strengthen the rule of law and address the conditions that give rise to violent crime in the first place.¹⁹⁶

And as UNODC's *Global Study on Homicide* points out:

in all countries where there has been a strengthening of the rule of law in the last 15 years there has also been a decline in the homicide rate, while most countries where homicide has increased have a relatively weak rule of law.¹⁹⁷

So, when levels of development increase in poor countries—as they certainly have since the end of the Cold War—it is not unreasonable to believe that homicide rates may

also have declined. Fearon's observations that homicide rates either declined or held steady in most regions would seem to support this supposition.

But the inconsistent findings of the Ouimet study and the huge data challenges that exist, particularly in the least-developed countries, mean that there is a significant level of uncertainty. Plus, the association between higher levels of human development and lower rates of homicide, not surprisingly, is stronger and weaker in different countries and regions at different times. Latin America, for example, ranks quite highly on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index, but the region also has the world's highest homicide rate.

This does not necessarily mean that there is no benign effect of rising human development on reducing homicide rates, but rather that this effect is offset by other factors that increase those rates. In the case of Latin America, the causes of this violence are manifold and include extremely high levels of inequality, a pervasive criminal gang culture, the murderously competitive drug trade, the wide availability of weapons—a legacy of armed conflict in the region—plus a “youth bulge” of young, poor, and often unemployed males and weak law enforcement systems.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

There is plenty of room for debate about the reliability of the global homicide trend data. But we see little evidence to suggest that the dramatic recent increases in homicide rates in parts of Latin America—much of it associated with organized criminal violence—point to a rising global trend.

In many states the robust data needed to determine whether criminal violence is increasing or decreasing simply do not exist.

It is quite true that organized criminal activity is prevalent in other regions of the world—notably in West Africa¹⁹⁹—but these developments do not seem to have resulted in the sort of huge increases in homicides that we have witnessed in Latin America and particularly in Mexico and Central America.

Nor is there any reason to believe that organized criminal violence is about to reverse the worldwide improvements in human security generated by the decline in the number and deadliness of armed conflicts. And this applies to all homicides, not just those associated with organized criminal violence.

It is true, however, that there remain huge gaps in our knowledge about much of the rest of the world. In many states the robust data needed to determine whether criminal violence is increasing or decreasing simply do not exist.

The US-based TBI at the University of San Diego draws on Mexican government and other sources to track and analyze national and sub-regional trends in drug-related homicides. But in many countries that have much higher homicide rates than Mexico—

like Honduras and El Salvador—the homicide data are not disaggregated, which means that the murders perpetrated by organized crime cannot be separately identified.

In least-developed and fragile states where robust homicide data are notable mostly by their absence, population surveys could, in principle, provide the data that are currently missing. Such surveys are used very successfully to measure progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

One of the great strengths of these surveys has been that they aim to use common definitions and common methodologies for all countries. This means that their findings are cross-nationally commensurable and can be used for comparative purposes, notably in comparing trend data for different countries and regions.

Similar surveys could measure the incidence of homicides and violent deaths in wartime, providing robust nationwide data at reasonable cost where none currently exist.

Population survey data can also be used to provide statistical estimates of the number of violent deaths perpetrated in each country over a given period. Surveys could collect data on both victims and perpetrators of all fatalities from violence—providing data on war deaths, including *indirect deaths* from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition, as well as on the number of deaths caused by organized crime and by individuals.

While such surveys are not cheap and are sometimes challenging to execute, and while they may raise sensitive political concerns for governments, they are by far the most effective means of generating robust and commensurable data on deaths caused by intentional violence—whether criminal, political, or a mix of both.

In fragile and war-affected states, reliable homicide and other criminal violence data are notable mostly by their absence.

PART I

ENDNOTES

OVERVIEW

- 1 References for all statistics and quotations in the Overview are found in the main body of the *Report* unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Recent studies examining the thesis that violence has declined include Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); A. Gat, "Is War Declining—and Why?" *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 2 (2013), doi: 10.1177/0022343312461023; Nils P. Gleditsch, "The Liberal Moment Fifteen Years On," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2008), doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00522.x; Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Plume, 2012); John Horgan, *The End of War* (San Francisco, CA: McSweeney's Books, 2012); Human Security Report Project (HSRP), *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (Vancouver, BC; New York: University of British Columbia, Human Security Centre; Oxford University Press, 2005); HSRP, *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); John Mueller, "War Has Almost Ceased to Exist: An Assessment," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 2 (2009), doi: 10.1002/j.1538-165X.2009.tb00650.x; and M. Spagat et al., "Estimating War Deaths: An Arena of Contestation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 6 (2009), doi: 10.1177/0022002709346253.
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CHAPTER 1

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- 27 *Ibid.*, 1.
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- 29 *Ibid.*, 48. Note that this is a different metric from that used to measure homicides where the indicator of deadliness is deaths per 100,000 of the population, per year.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.* The 0.7 percent figure is based on a conservative estimate of some 40 million battle deaths for the twentieth century. This is lower than the 60-million-plus war deaths other sources have estimated for World War II alone, but a substantial percentage of the latter were "indirect" deaths not caused directly by violence. As Pinker points out, "Even if we tripled or quadrupled the estimate [for the twentieth century] to include indirect deaths from war-caused famine and disease, it would barely narrow the gap between state and nonstate societies." If we assume that 180 million people died during the twentieth century as a result of war and also of "genocides, purges, and other man-made disasters," this would add up to a war death rate of only 3 percent. See Pinker, *Better Angels*, 50.

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- 56 *Ibid.*, 6. Note the only violent campaigns considered in the study were those that accumulated 1,000 or more battle deaths.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 9 (Figure 1.5).
- 58 In the early days of apartheid in South Africa, most workers in the country's mines were unskilled. If they went on strike, they were simply sacked, sent back to the reserves, and new unskilled workers were brought in to replace them. The structural power associated with their role was zero. In today's high-tech mining operations in South Africa, a large percentage of the workforce is skilled. They are effectively irreplaceable, giving them this structural power that the early workers were denied.
- 59 *HSRP, Human Security Report 2009/2010*, 79.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Pinker, *Better Angels*, xxiv.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 49, Figure 1.1, data series "Average of 8 hunter-gatherer societies."
- 63 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 482.
- 65 *Ibid.*, xxv.
- 66 *Ibid.*, xxv and Chapter 8.
- 67 *Ibid.*, xxv and Chapter 9.
- 68 *Ibid.*, xxvi.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 688.
- 70 *Ibid.*, xxvi.
- 71 *Ibid.*
- 72 *Ibid.*, 691.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 692.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 672.
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- 76 *Deadliness* here is defined as a function of the percentage of the national population killed over a particular period of time. In the case of Rwanda, this amounted to 500,000 to 800,000 fatalities over a period of less than four months in a population of under 6 million. On the use of machetes in the genocide, see P. Verwimp, "Machetes and Firearms: The Organization of Massacres in Rwanda," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 1 (2006): 5–22, doi: 10.1177/0022343306059576.
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- 84 *Better Angels* also explores the idea that changes in our behaviour may have been induced by recent biological evolution of the human brain. But hard evidence for this thesis is sparse—and Pinker concludes that since "we have the means to explain all the declines of violence without invoking recent biological evolution ... for the time being, we have no need for that hypothesis." Pinker, *Better Angels*, 621–622.
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- 87 Elizabeth Kolbert, "Peace in Our Time: Steven Pinker's History of Violence," *The New Yorker*, 3 October 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2011/10/03/111003crbo_books_kolbert, and John Gray, "Delusions of Peace," *Prospect*, 21 September 2011, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/john-gray-steven-pinker-violence-review/>. Pinker's own data show an increase in the destructiveness of wars until the mid-twentieth century. See Pinker, *Better Angels*, 226–227.

- 88 Steven Pinker, "Frequently Asked Questions about *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*," <http://stevenpinker.com/pages/frequently-asked-questions-about-better-angels-our-nature-why-violence-has-declined>.
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- 90 Ibid., 198–200.
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- 93 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 195.
- 94 Robert Jervis, "Pinker the Prophet," *The National Interest*, November/December 2011, http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/pinker/files/pinker_the_prophet.pdf.
- 95 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 47.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Pinker, "Frequently Asked Questions."
- 98 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 195.
- 99 Ibid., 194–195.
- 100 Kolbert, "Peace in Our Time"
- 101 Pinker, "Frequently Asked Questions."
- 102 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 53.
- 103 For a critique, see Humphrey Clarke, "Steven Pinker and the An Lushan Revolt," *Quodliberta* (blog), 6 November 2011, <http://bedejournal.blogspot.ca/2011/11/steven-pinker-and-an-lushan-revolt.html>. Pinker also stresses that this estimate is far from certain.
- 104 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 193.
- 105 Ibid. Emphasis added.
- 106 Ibid., 192.
- 107 Ibid., 53, Figure 2–3.
- 108 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2011 #15: 9
- 109 Ibid.

- 110 Honduras's homicide rate in 2010 was 82 per 100,000 per year, the highest in the world. See *ibid.*, 93.
- 111 See Fry, *War, Peace, and Human Nature*. It is not clear whether Pinker had seen this new study when he took part in an online Q & A organized by reddit.com in March 2013, but he is certainly aware of this line of criticism. Asked whether anthropologists generally agree or disagree with his position, he replied that:
- My claim wasn't about hunter-gatherer societies specifically, but about traditional societies that live in a state of anarchy, specifically, not under the control of a centralized state. Thus I present data from hunter-gather societies, and separately data from hunter-horticulturalists and other tribal groups. Most of them have rates of violence that are high by the standards of modern states. I presented every quantitative estimate I could find in the literature; the low end of the range extends to rates of death in warfare of 0, but the high end includes societies in which a quarter to a half of the men are killed by others. The average across all estimates is way higher than for state societies in the 20th century. As far as I can tell, this conclusion is not controversial among anthropologists who care about numbers, and have examined quantitative data on per-capita rates of violence in different societies. It is blazingly controversial among non-quantitative anthropologists, though the objections are often political and moral rather than empirical—namely that it is harmful to non-state peoples to depict them as having high rates of violence, since it would make it easier to justify exploiting or oppressing them.
- See "Ask Me Anything (Steven Pinker)," Reddit, 12 March 2013, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAMa/comments/1a67x4/i_am_steve_pinker_a_cognitive_psychologist_at.
- 112 See Douglas P. Fry, "Peace in Our Time: Steven Pinker Offers a Curiously Foreshortened Account of Humanity's Irenic Urges," *BookForum*, December/January 2012, http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/018_04/8575.
- 113 See Fry, *War, Peace, and Human Nature*, 15. Emphasis added.
- 114 See Fry, *War, Peace, and Human Nature*, 15.
- 115 Douglas P. Fry, *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–2.
- 116 See Bradley A. Thayer, "Humans, Not Angels: Reasons to Doubt the Decline of War Thesis," *International Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (2013): 411–416.
- 117 *Ibid.*
- 118 *Ibid.*

- 119 Most analysts do, however, believe that China would be prepared to use force against Taiwan if the latter declared independence.
- 120 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 362.
- 121 Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "The Decline of War? Multiple Trajectories and Diverging Trends," *International Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (2013): 405–411.
- 122 Ibid.
- 123 See Dean G. Pruitt, Sung Hee Kim, and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*, 3rd ed., McGraw-Hill series in social psychology (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004).
- 124 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 672. Emphasis added.
- 125 Levy and Thompson, "The Decline of War?"
- 126 The logic of this argument is spelled out in detail in Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?" in *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).
- 127 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 671–672.
- 128 Ibid., 672. Emphasis added.
- 129 Ibid., xxiv.
- 130 See, for example, Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, "Steven Pinker on the Alleged Decline of Violence," *Dissident Voice*, 5 December 2012, <http://dissidentvoice.org/2012/12/steven-pinker-on-the-alleged-decline-of-violence/>, and Kolbert, "Peace in Our Time." The term "structural violence" was introduced and popularized by Johan Galtung in 1969. See J. Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969), doi: 10.1177/002234336900600301.
- 131 The leading proponent of this particular approach to structural violence is health practitioner Paul Farmer. See Paul E. Farmer et al., "Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine," *PLoS Medicine* 3, no. 10 (2006), doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.0030449.
- 132 Tord Høivik, "The Demography of Structural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 14, no. 1 (1977), doi: 10.1177/002234337701400104.
- 133 Note that there are no estimates for the total number of deaths from physical violence for 1970, but the 2011 Geneva Declaration estimates that the number of people dying each year from all forms of physical violence between 2004 and 2009 was (at least) half a million. Keith Krause, Robert Muggah, and Elisabeth Gilgen, *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43.

- 134 Pinker, "Frequently Asked Questions."
- 135 Kolbert, "Peace in Our Time."
- 136 Pinker, "Frequently Asked Questions."
- 137 Herman and Peterson, "Reality Denial."
- 138 The term "Long Peace" originated with John Lewis Gaddis. See John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Other scholars refer to the absence of war between "major powers" rather than "great powers." Pinker includes the absence of war between developed states under the Long Peace rubric. But whether we look at great powers, major powers, or developed states, the finding is the same—there have been no wars between them since 1946.
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- 140 Gray, "Delusions of Peace."
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- 144 Håvard Hegre et al., "Predicting Armed Conflict, 2010–2050," *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2013): 1, doi: 10.1111/isqu.12007.
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- 147 Goldstein, *Winning the War on War*, 328.

CHAPTER 2

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- 149 World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), 76.
- 150 Steven A. Zyck and Robert Muggah, "Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Prevention," *International Journal of Security and Development* 1, no. 1 (2012): 68. Emphasis added.
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- 152 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011).
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- 154 Ibid.
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- 158 Claire Suddath, "The War on Drugs," *Time*, 25 March 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1887488,00.html>.
- 159 Trans-Border Institute, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2011," March 2012, <http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/2012-tbi-drugviolence.pdf>, p. 9.
- 160 Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Rios, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2011* (San Diego: TBI, 2012), 11.
- 161 Cory Molzahn, Octavio Rodriguez, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2012* (San Diego: TBI, 2013), 1.

- 162 Figure 2.2 is based on a similar graph published in the Small Arms Survey 2012 (The Graduate Institute Geneva/Small Arms Survey, *Small Arms Survey 2012: Moving Targets* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 51). Note that the battle-death tolls, as well as the Mexico homicide data, displayed in Figure 2.2 are likely undercounts of the true extent of the violence. Battle-death data are from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), while data for organized crime-related killings in Mexico are from TBI. When comparing figures, it is important to keep in mind that the data for Mexico and the countries affected by armed conflict and violence against civilians originate from different sources. We, however, expect the general pattern shown in Figure 2.2 to be representative.
- 163 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2012b, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_battle-related_deaths_dataset; UCDP, Non-State Conflict Dataset v2.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_non-state_conflict_dataset_; UCDP, One-Sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_one-sided_violence_dataset_; Trans-Border Institute, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2001–2009,” January 2010, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/2010-Shirk-JMP-Drug_Violence.pdf, p. 4; Trans-Border Institute, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis;” Trans-Border Institute, “Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2011,” March 2012, <http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/2012-tbi-drugviolence.pdf>, p. 9.
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- 165 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Homicide Statistics 2012, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>.
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- 176 UCDP, "About UCDP," http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/program_overview/about_ucdp/.
- 177 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2012b, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_battle-related_deaths_dataset; UCDP, Non-State Conflict Dataset v2.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_non-state_conflict_dataset_; UCDP, One-Sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_one-sided_violence_dataset; Trans-Border Institute, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011," March 2012, <http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/2012-tbi-drugviolence.pdf>, p. 9.
- 178 UCDP, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/faq/>. Emphasis added.
- 179 Geneva Declaration, *Global Burden*, 4.
- 180 Ibid., 70. Note that this figure is higher than the UCDP average for deaths from organized violence between 2004 and 2009, which adds to 28,400. This is because the GBAV estimate is based on a range of different sources.
- 181 Ibid., 4.
- 182 Geneva Declaration, *Global Burden*, 28.
- 183 Pinker, *Better Angels*, xxi.
- 184 Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19–28.
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- 190 As the 2011 *World Development Report* notes, "insufficient data are available on current and past homicide rates in Sub-Saharan Africa to establish a regional trend." See World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), 68.
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- 192 Geneva Declaration, *Global Burden*, 152.
- 193 Marc Ouimet, "A World of Homicides: The Effect of Economic Development, Income Inequality, and Excess Infant Mortality on the Homicide Rate for 165 Countries in 2010," *Homicide Studies* 16, no. 3 (August 2012): 238–258.
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- 195 It could be the case that lower rates of homicide promote economic development or that another variable, such as better governance, is responsible for both.
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PART II

TRENDS IN HUMAN INSECURITY

Part II of this *Report* reviews the security impact of the Arab Spring on the Middle East, and global trends in three types of deadly armed violence. “State-based” conflicts are those between states, or between a state and a non-state armed group, or groups. “Non-state conflicts” are fought between non-state armed groups with no involvement by the government. “One-sided violence” is deadly violence directed at unarmed civilians by governments or non-state groups.

TRENDS IN HUMAN INSECURITY

Chapter 3: The Arab Spring 81

The “Arab Spring” refers to the series of uprisings, some of them extremely violent, that started at the end of 2010 and continue to this day. Most of the current violence is associated with the civil war in Syria, which has become by far the deadliest of the conflicts in the region.

Chapter 4: State-Based Armed Conflict 86

The data show that the share of low-intensity conflicts went up in 2011. But high-intensity conflicts, those that cause 1,000 or more battle deaths, have continued to decline. Indeed since the late 1980s the number of high-intensity conflicts has more than halved.

Chapter 5: Non-State Armed Conflict 95

Conflicts between non-state armed groups tend to be short-lived and kill fewer people than state-based conflicts. In 2011 non-state conflict numbers and battle deaths both increased. But there has been no clear trend in either non-state conflict numbers or battle deaths for the past quarter of a century.

Chapter 6: Deadly Assaults on Civilians 105

Although the number of campaigns of deadly violence increased slightly in 2011, the actual number of campaigns is still just half that of 2002, which was the peak year since data started being collected in 1989. Deaths from one-sided violence remain dramatically lower than in the mid-1990s.



MidoSemsem / Bigstock. EGYPT.

CHAPTER 3

The Arab Spring

In December of 2010, the disillusioned owner of a vegetable stand set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, after having been repeatedly mistreated by the local police and municipal authorities. Few observers at the time realized that this would set in motion a chain of events that would sweep across several Middle Eastern and North African countries, leading to some of the most widespread political changes the region has seen in decades.

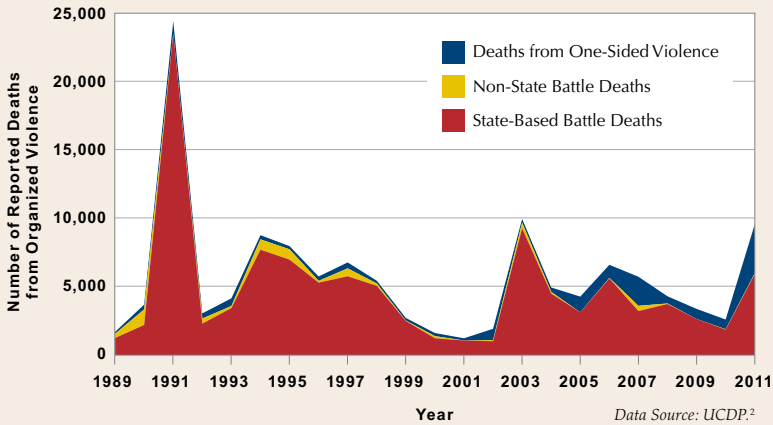
What became known as the “Arab Spring” was also associated with a significant upsurge of violence in the Middle East and North Africa; however, the level of violence varied across countries in the region. In total, reported deaths from organized violence in the Middle East and North Africa added up to more than 9,500—over a quarter of the global total in 2011. As Figure 3.1 shows, this was a

Reported deaths in the Middle East and North Africa added up to over a quarter of the global total in 2011.

higher death toll than this region had experienced since 2003, the first year of the Iraq War.

The violence that occurred during the Arab Spring took several different forms, from fighting between government forces and rebel groups (*state-based conflict*), to clashes between non-state groups (*non-state conflict*) and deadly assaults against civilians (*one-sided violence*), such as the violent suppression of protests and demonstrations. Uppsala University’s Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP’s) categorization of organized violence into state-based conflicts, non-state conflicts, and one-sided violence enables us to look at how these different forms of violence varied across countries affected by Arab Spring uprisings.¹

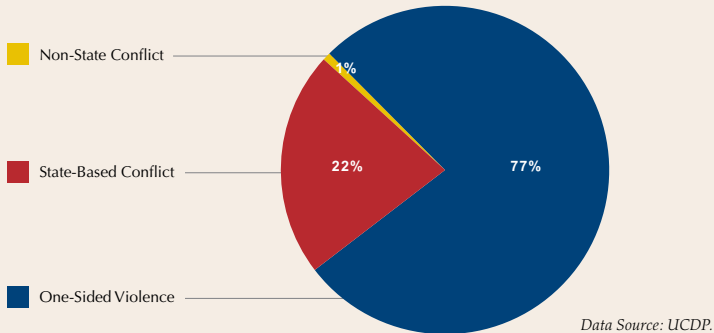
Figure 3.1 Reported Deaths from Organized Violence in the Middle East and North Africa, 1989–2011



The Arab Spring has led to an upsurge in deaths from organized violence in the region. The death toll in 2011 was surpassed only by peaks in 1991 and 2003, which were associated with US-led invasions of Iraq.

UCDP recorded more total deaths in Syria than in other Arab Spring countries. In Syria in 2011, recorded incidents fell into all three categories of violence. As Figure 3.2 shows, of the total number of deaths recorded in the country, the largest share fell into the one-sided violence category. Over three-quarters of the fatalities reported that year were caused by the violent suppression of unarmed civilians engaged in anti-government demonstrations.

Figure 3.2 Reported Deaths from Arab Spring–Related Organized Violence in Syria in 2011, by Type



In 2011, the first year of the Syrian uprising, the vast majority of deaths were a result of attacks on unarmed civilians. The 2012 data were released after this chapter was completed. They indicate a far greater percentage of deaths were state-based.

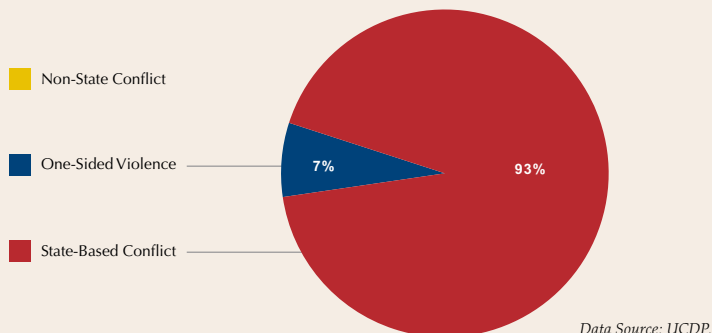
The remaining deaths in 2011—less than a quarter of the total—were almost exclusively a result of state-based combat between the Syrian government and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the main opposition force. (In 2012 this ratio shifted sharply with a much greater percentage of deaths resulting from violent clashes between the regime and opposition groups.) Violence was also coded in Syria between armed non-state groups on opposing sides, with supporters of Bashar al-Assad fighting against opposition groups. This low-intensity non-state conflict escalated in July following the discovery of the bodies of three supporters of the Assad regime who had been killed in a neighbourhood in the city of Homs.³

Less than a quarter of the total deaths from organized violence in Syria in 2011 were exclusively the result of state-based combat.

In Libya, violent responses by the government to the initial protests that began in February were coded as one-sided violence. This one-sided violence, however, soon gave way to battles between the government and newly formed rebel forces, which were subsequently counted under the category of state-based conflict. As Figure 3.3 shows, combat between forces of Muammar Gaddafi's government and the National

Transitional Council (NTC) caused 93 percent of the total reported deaths from all types of organized violence in that country. No non-state violence was recorded during the toppling of the Libyan government, as—in contrast to the situation in Syria—any supporters and opponents of the Gaddafi regime who may have clashed in violent confrontations without the participation of government forces did so in a largely ad hoc unorganized way, and thus their activity could not be coded into data tracking “organized” violence.⁴

Figure 3.3 Reported Deaths from Arab Spring–Related Organized Violence in Libya in 2011, by Type



In Libya the armed resistance against the Gaddafi regime accounted for most of the deaths in 2011. Rebels defeated Gaddafi's forces in the fall of 2011 and the level of violence decreased.

In Yemen and Bahrain, deaths were coded from one-sided attacks on civilians when regime forces violently suppressed anti-government protests. In Yemen the state-based conflict between the government and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) also intensified significantly. This conflict, which includes US forces fighting on the side of the Yemeni government, has been ongoing since 2009 and is not directly related to the Arab Spring. However, there is some indication that the fighting escalated in the wake of the turmoil caused by the Arab Spring protests. Divisions within the military following the clampdown on anti-government protesters⁵ helped AQAP seize control of areas in Abyan, Shabwah, Hadramawt, Marib, and Lahj provinces.⁶ The US, on the other hand, increased attacks against top AQAP leaders.⁷

In Yemen and Bahrain, deaths were coded from one-sided attacks on civilians when regime forces violently put down anti-government protests.

In Egypt and Tunisia, no organized violence that was directly related to the ousting of presidents Hosni Mubarak and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was recorded, for similar reasons in both situations. Although in each case many people were killed, the characteristics of the situations did not meet the requirements for inclusion in UCDP's data on organized violence. On one hand, in neither country were the protesters formally

organized, often acting in an ad hoc, or only loosely organized, manner. This precluded the possibility of counting these deaths in the category of organized state-based conflict.⁸ On the other hand, most reports on the pre-transition violence in both countries noted the use of violence by at least some protesters. Although in each country many of the protesters were peaceful, others attempted to retaliate by, for example, throwing Molotov cocktails at government forces or setting government buildings on fire. However great the imbalance between the violence and weaponry employed by the two sides may have been, the resulting deaths cannot be counted as one-sided violence since protesters were not unarmed.⁹

In the wake of the regime change in Egypt, however, tensions between Copts and Muslims escalated into a low-intensity non-state conflict, and this was coded in UCDP data. Although hostilities between the two religious groups preceded the Arab Spring, and the groups had clashed before, 2011 was the first year that battle deaths surpassed the threshold required to be included in UCDP data.

The events of the Arab Spring have understandably garnered much interest, analysis, and speculation by observers of political currents in the region. One common concern, particularly in the West, is over the increased influence of Islamist fighters and extremist political groups in transition and post-transition settings—with some being seen as more moderate than others. For example, referring to the post-transition situations in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, a 2012 news article expressed concerns shared by many other observers: "As moderate Islamist leaders in all three countries begin to craft post-

revolutionary constitutions, the Salafists in their midst are pushing—sometimes at the ballot box, sometimes at the point of a gun—to create societies that more closely mirror their ultraconservative religious beliefs and lifestyles.”¹⁰

Other commentators have expressed doubt that new regimes would be any less authoritarian than those they replaced—whether this authoritarianism would be Islamist in nature or more secular. Observers of post-transition dynamics in Egypt noted the continued presence of many political figures associated with the Mubarak government or even earlier regimes and their authoritarian styles of rule in that country. Protests erupted again in late 2012 as the struggle over Egypt’s new political system continued.¹¹

Still others have noted that the Arab Spring movement has already had, and may continue to have, an indirect effect on violence in countries neighbouring the Middle East and North Africa. The situation that emerged in Mali following the end of major fighting in Libya is one example of these claimed effects. In Mali’s northern region, the simmering conflict involving the country’s ethnic Tuareg population intensified as fighters—many of

them Tuareg—who had fought on the side of the Gaddafi government returned to Mali. The weapons and experience gained in Libya bolstered their secessionist movement, and rebels made significant territorial gains early in 2012. The Malian army’s dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the rebellion triggered a military coup in March of that year.¹² However, the Tuareg rebels and their allies were able to take advantage of the distraction offered by the coup to make even further gains, taking over Timbuktu on 1 April.¹³

The situation changed again when Islamist actors in the region—some with links to al-Qaeda—effectively took over the rebellion for their own purposes, marginalizing the Tuareg group that had launched the anti-government offensive of 2012.¹⁴ By the end of 2012, Islamist groups controlled much of northern Mali, harshly enforcing Sharia law in areas under their control. These developments triggered a military intervention by France and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).¹⁵

The Arab Spring protests and their aftermath will clearly have many long-lasting effects on the people and political systems of many countries. By the end of 2012, Arab Spring-related events and conflicts had already been ongoing for two years. It will, however, take much more time for all the consequences of these game-changing events to become clear.

The Arab Spring protests and their aftermath will have many long-lasting effects on the people and political systems of many countries.



Richard Harvey / Dreamstime. SYRIA.

CHAPTER 4

State-Based Armed Conflict

This chapter provides a global and regional overview of trends in *state-based armed conflicts*—those in which at least one of the warring parties is the government of a state.¹⁶

Globally, the number of conflicts has been stabilizing at a relatively high level (Figure 4.1). However, because today's conflicts are mostly low in intensity, global battle-death tolls have remained relatively low—despite a slight increase from 2010 to 2011 (Figure 4.2).

The data show that the share of conflicts that are low-intensity has gone up, while the share of *high-intensity conflicts*—those that cause 1,000 or more battle deaths in a year—has gone down (Figure 4.3). As our study of persistent conflicts in the *Human Security Report 2012* finds, low-intensity conflicts can be the most difficult ones to resolve.

High-intensity conflicts have fluctuated at a relatively low level for most of the 2000s (Figure 4.4). The six high-intensity conflicts active in 2011 were located in Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Some of these conflicts have been active, and among the most deadly, for many years.

Only one of the high-intensity conflicts mentioned above—that in Libya—was directly related to the Arab Spring.¹⁷ The wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen were associated with ongoing international and local campaigns against Islamist groups, while the violence in Sudan was mostly related to the events surrounding South Sudan's independence, and, to a lesser extent, to continuing problems in the Darfur region.¹⁸

As the 2012 Human Security Report demonstrates, low-intensity conflicts are among the most difficult to bring to an end.

Most state-based conflicts today are *intrastate conflicts*, which are fought between the government of a state and one or more non-state armed group over control of government power or a specific territory. Many of the high-intensity conflicts in 2011—such as the conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen—were civil wars in which troops from other states participated in the conflict in support of one or more of the warring parties. These

Conflicts between states
— like the bloody war
between Ethiopia and
Eritrea in the late 1990s—
tend to be much deadlier
than intrastate conflicts.

are called *internationalized intrastate conflicts*. Although they remain less common than intrastate conflicts, in 2011 there were more internationalized intrastate conflicts than had been recorded since 1946, and they continue to be more deadly than intrastate conflicts on average (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

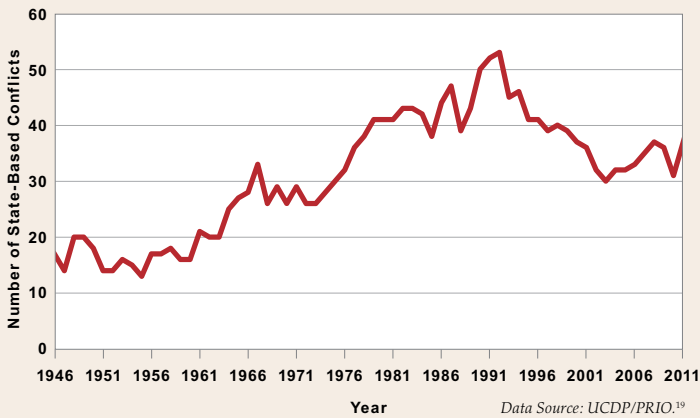
Less commonly seen in recent years are *interstate conflicts*, or those fought between two or more states. In the past 10 years, most of the few interstate conflicts we have seen—including one in 2011 between Cambodia and Thailand—have been very small compared to those taking place in the 1990s and at the turn of the century. In general, however, conflicts between states, such as the high-intensity struggle between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to 2000, tend to be much deadlier than intrastate conflicts.

The deadliest region in the world since 2005 remained Central and South Asia, the location of ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite the continued high levels of violence, however, reported battle deaths declined by 50 percent between 2009 and 2011.

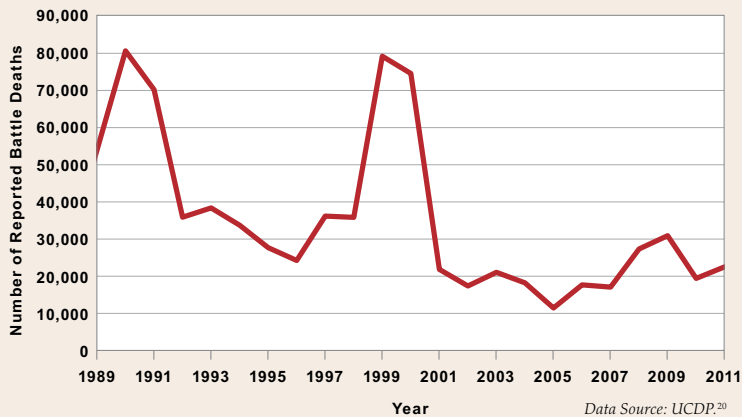
In Central and South Asia,
reported battle deaths
declined by 50 percent
between 2009 and 2011.

On the other hand, in recent years, the Middle East and North Africa—the second-most-deadly region in 2011—saw reported battle deaths triple, going from under 2,000 in 2010 to almost 6,000 in 2011. Part of the reason for this increase can be attributed to the events related directly and indirectly to the Arab Spring, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

In sub-Saharan Africa, conflicts remained numerous, driven in part by events surrounding the independence of South Sudan. Yet, reported battle deaths continued to be relatively low for this region compared with the 1990s.

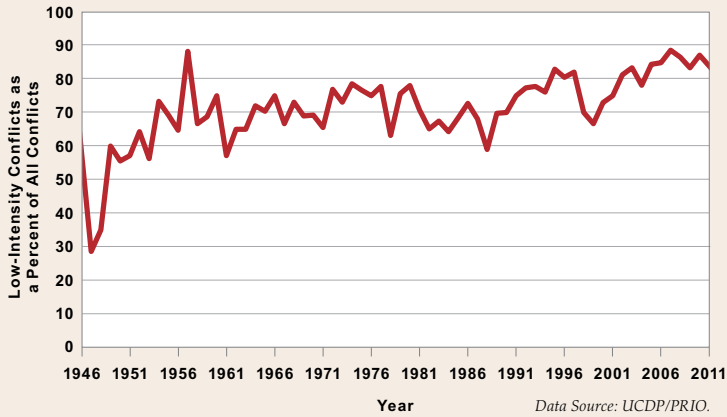
Figure 4.1 Global Trends in State-Based Conflicts, 1946–2011

After declining significantly from their peak in the early 1990s, global conflict numbers have been hovering at a fairly high level relative to the range of annual figures seen since 1946. Among the conflicts that led to a slight increase in conflict numbers between 2010 and 2011 were those in Burma, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Pakistan that restarted after a year or more of inactivity, as well as new conflicts that erupted in Libya, South Sudan, and Sudan.

Figure 4.2 Global Battle Deaths from State-Based Conflicts, 1989–2011

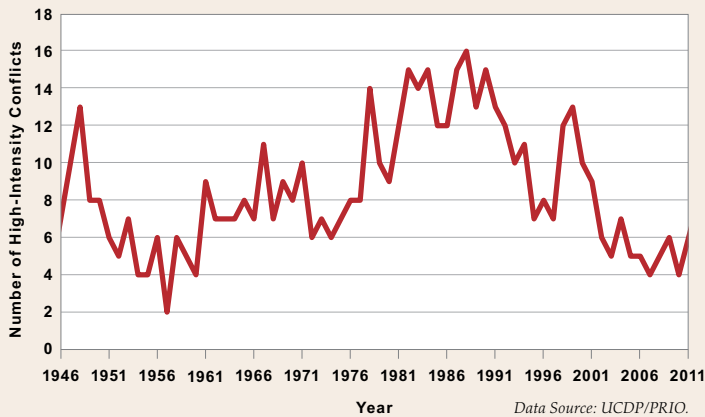
Global battle deaths increased by 16 percent between 2010 and 2011 but remained at a low level relative to much of the earlier period in the data. Deadly conflict in Ethiopia over the territory of Eritrea caused a spike in battle deaths in the immediate post-Cold War period. The conflict between Ethiopia and newly independent Eritrea caused well over half of global battle deaths in 1999 and two-thirds of the total in the year 2000.

Figure 4.3 Low-Intensity Conflicts as Share of All State-Based Conflicts, 1946–2011



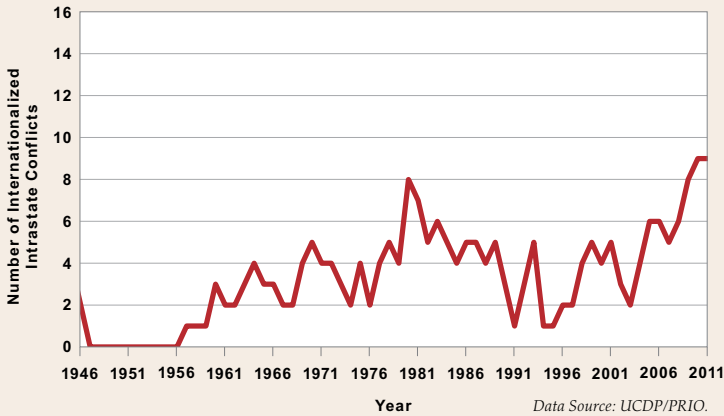
While the number of conflicts has been relatively high in recent years, the vast majority have been of low intensity. As we discuss in the *Human Security Report 2012*, small conflicts concentrated in peripheral areas are more likely to persist. Due to their low death tolls and geographical isolation, they pose little threat to the central government, and there is little incentive to invest in ending them.²¹

Figure 4.4 Global Trends in High-Intensity Conflicts, 1946–2011



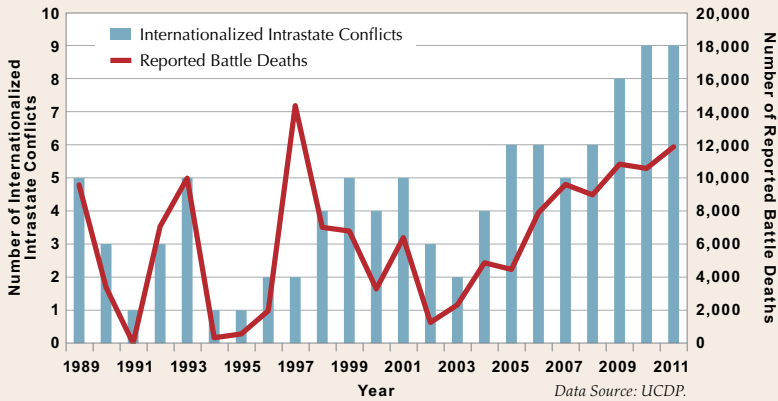
High-intensity conflicts continue to be relatively rare. In 2011 Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen saw conflicts with 1,000 or more battle deaths. The deadliest conflict was in Afghanistan, and, as with those in Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, it was associated with campaigns against Islamist groups. Libya's conflict was directly related to the Arab Spring protests, while Sudan's was primarily caused by events surrounding South Sudan's independence.

Figure 4.5 Global Trends in Internationalized Intrastate Conflicts, 1946–2011



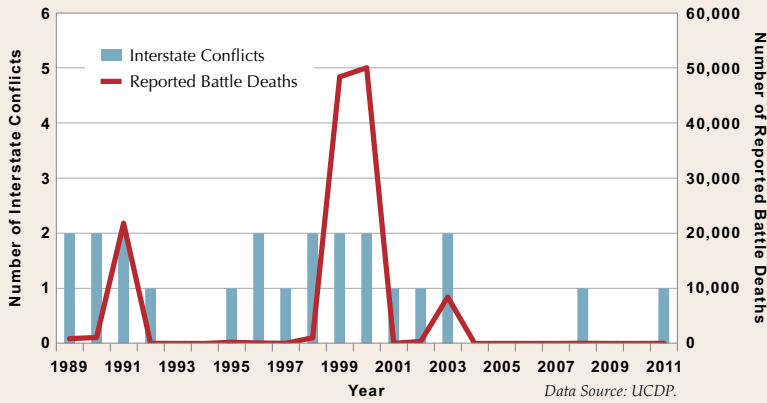
Only a minority of intrastate conflicts involve foreign troops. But the number of these internationalized intrastate conflicts has increased over the past 10 years. In 2010 and 2011 there were more of these conflicts than at any other time since the end of World War II. Internationalized intrastate conflicts in both years took place in several locations, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, and Yemen.

Figure 4.6 Internationalized Intrastate Conflicts and Battle Deaths, 1989–2011



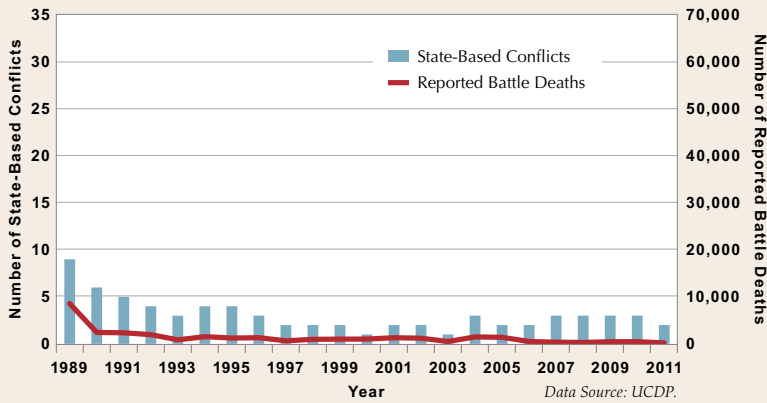
Military intervention to support one side in a civil war is associated with high death tolls—nearly 1,500 per conflict in an average year. This devastating effect is not limited to intervention by major powers. The high death toll for this type of conflict in 1997, for example, was caused by conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo, both of which saw interventions by troops from neighbouring countries.

Figure 4.7 Interstate Conflicts and Battle Deaths, 1989–2011



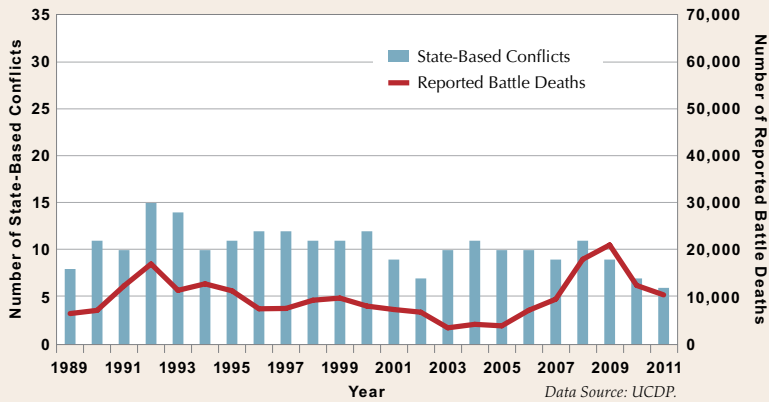
Conflicts between states have been infrequent since the end of the Cold War. The two interstate conflicts recorded since 2004 were relatively small. However, several of the interstate conflicts recorded prior to 2004 caused very high battle-death tolls, particularly during certain years. These include the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait in 1991 and the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1999 and 2000, both of which caused tens of thousands of reported battle deaths in those years.

Figure 4.8 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths in the Americas, 1989–2011



State-based conflicts in the Americas have not been very numerous or deadly. Yet, much of the ongoing violence surrounding the drug trade is not included in the UCDP data. Violence between cartels and state forces, while organized, differs from conflicts seen elsewhere, where governments and rebels fight over government power or territorial independence. Chapter 2 discusses data on organized crime in more depth.

**Figure 4.9 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths
in Central and South Asia, 1989–2011**



In 2011 the number of state-based conflicts in Central and South Asia continued a decline that began in 2009. This trend was driven in large part by the decreasing number of conflicts in India. In 2011 only two conflicts were coded in the country—the lowest number of any year covered by the data.

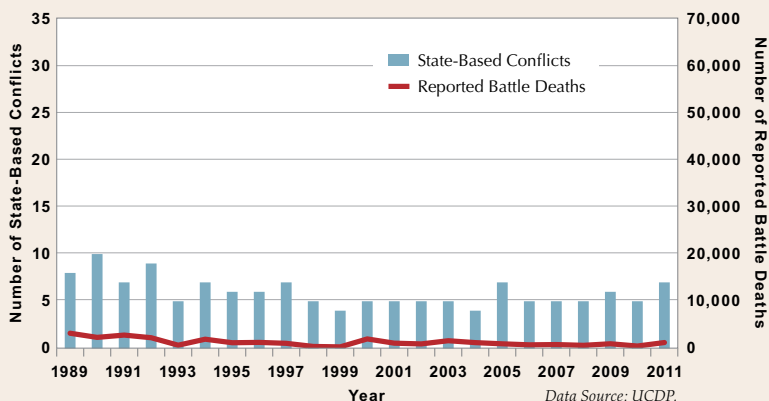
Although this region remains the deadliest in the world, reported battle deaths declined by 50 percent between 2009 and 2011. The lower death toll in this region was partly due to the ending of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009 that started in the 1980s and had grown increasingly deadly in its last two years. In 2009, during the massive government offensive against the Tamil rebels, Sri Lanka accounted for almost 40 percent of the regional total.

The decline was also due to the drop in reported battle deaths in Pakistan, where government forces have fought the Taliban since 2008. After peaking in 2009, battle deaths in this conflict declined by nearly 60 percent between 2009 and 2011. Despite this drop, however, the conflict continued at a high level of intensity in 2011 that was second only to the conflict in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, where the US and other external powers are fighting with the local government against the Taliban, death tolls not only remained high but also increased in 2011. The deadliest conflict in the world in 2011 by a wide margin, the conflict in Afghanistan, caused 32 percent of the global battle-death toll in that year, and 70 percent of the battle-death toll in Central and South Asia.

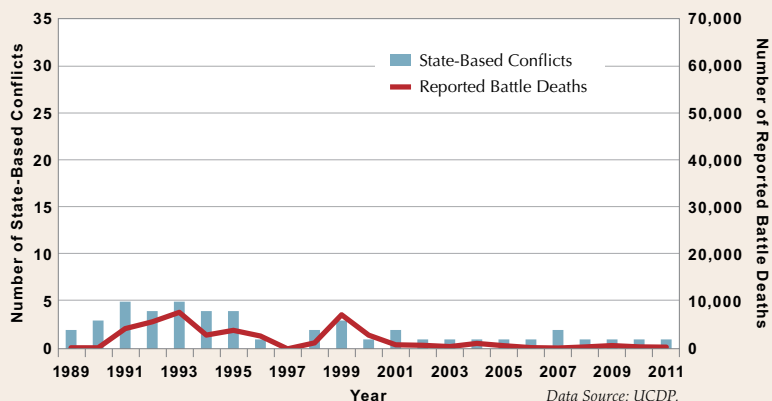
In 2011 the conflict in Pakistan continued at a high level of intensity that was second only to the world's deadliest conflict—that in Afghanistan.

Figure 4.10 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, 1989–2011



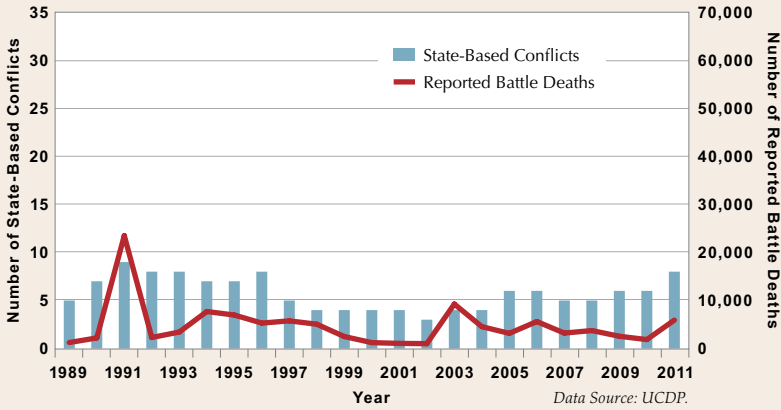
East and Southeast Asia and Oceania saw a small increase in conflicts in 2011. One conflict recurred in Burma over the Kachin territory after having been inactive since 1993. The second onset was a low-intensity conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. Battle-death tolls remained low despite more than doubling in 2011 due in part to the escalation of ongoing intrastate conflicts in Burma, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Figure 4.11 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths in Europe, 1989–2011



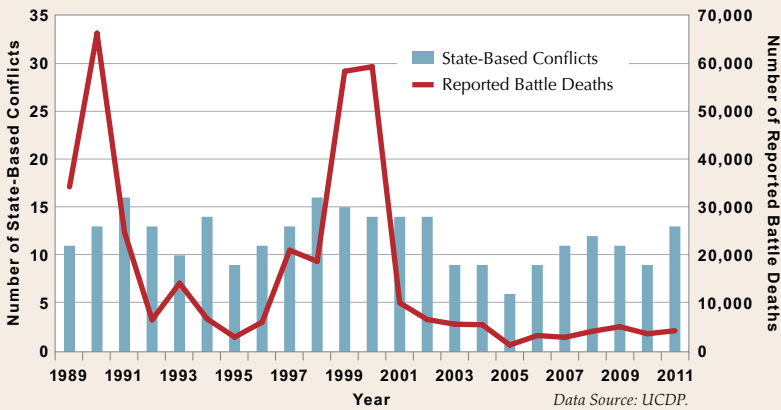
The only state-based conflict active in Europe in 2011 occurred in Russia between government troops and the Forces of the Caucasus Emirate, a rebel group that first appeared in the data in 2007. Despite a drop in conflict intensity from 2009 to 2011, the fighting continued to cause hundreds of battle deaths each year. This conflict was also associated with violence against civilians, which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Figure 4.12 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths in the Middle East and North Africa, 1989–2011



The number of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa increased by two in 2011 with conflict onsets in Libya and Syria that were both related to the Arab Spring. Battle deaths in this region also increased in 2011. In addition to the Arab Spring conflicts in Libya and Syria, the increase was a result of the escalation of ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Iran, and Turkey.

Figure 4.13 State-Based Conflicts and Battle Deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2011



Sub-Saharan Africa experienced an increase in conflicts in 2011. Part of the increase was due to the events surrounding South Sudan’s independence. Battle deaths, however, remained relatively low for this region. Of the 13 conflicts recorded in 2011, only two—one in Sudan and one in Somalia—were high-intensity conflicts with 1,000 or more battle deaths per year.



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CHAPTER 5

Non-State Armed Conflict

Conflicts between states, as well as those between states and rebel groups, tend to dominate war-related news headlines. For the past two years world attention has focused on the escalating violence between Bashar al-Assad's regime and armed opposition groups in Syria.

But not all violent struggles involve government troops. Fighting also occurs between non-state actors without state security forces playing a direct role in the conflict. This type of armed struggle, called *non-state conflict*,²² has been seen in all regions of the world (Figures 5.6–5.13). As we noted previously, it also encompasses some of the Arab Spring-related violence—including some of the violence seen recently in Syria.

Some non-state conflicts are fought between formally organized groups such as rebel forces, for example that in Sudan between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Others break out between less-organized groups such as tribes, often over land or other resources. In Kenya, for example, the Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups often clash over land rights.²³

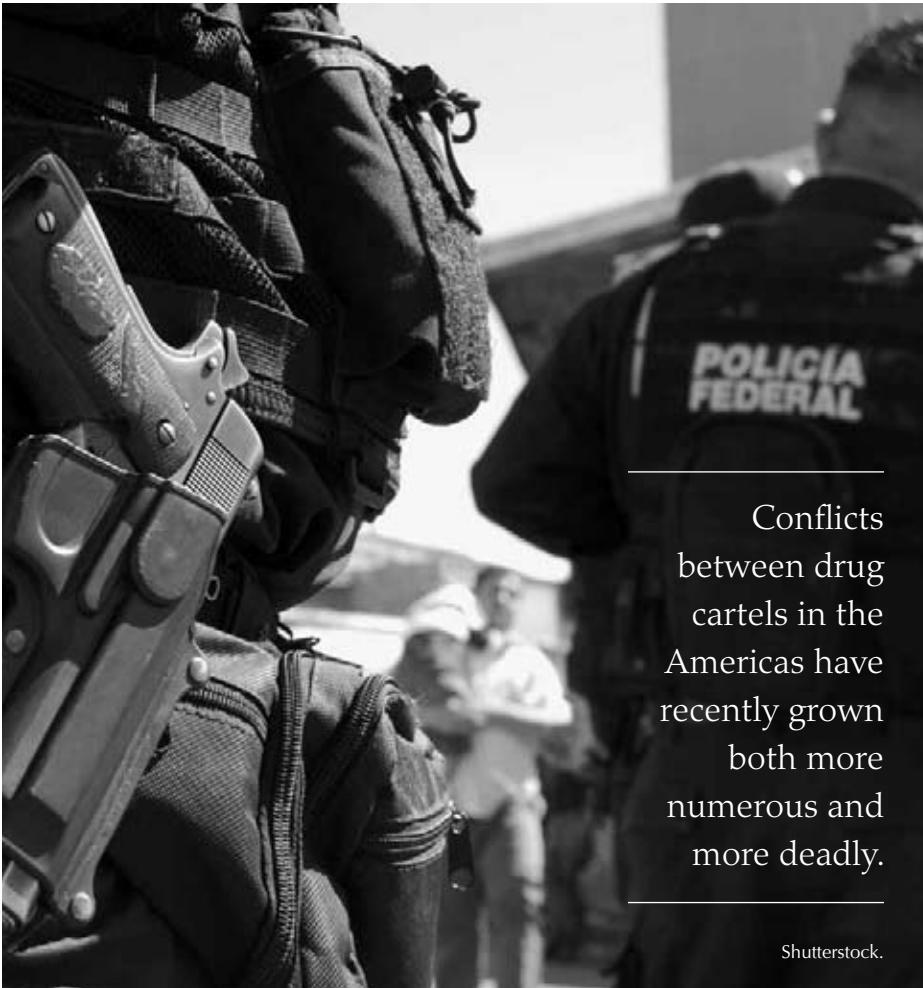
Since our analysis of the data in the *Human Security Report 2012*, non-state conflicts have grown more numerous (Figure 5.1). While the recent increase may be caused by short-term volatility in the data, the trend since 1989 also appears to indicate an uneven increase in the number of non-state conflicts over the past two decades. This trend is concerning,

Since our analysis of the data in the *Human Security Report 2012*, there has been an increase in the global number of non-state conflicts.

although it is unclear to what extent—if any—the increase may be influenced by an upsurge in reporting on non-state conflicts over the years.

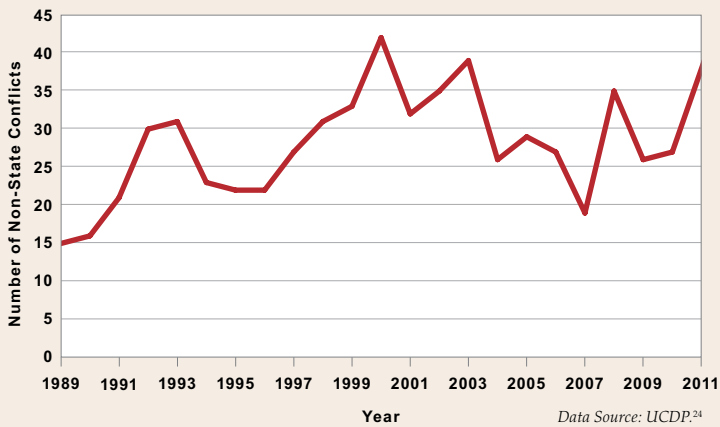
Although most non-state conflicts do not cause many battle deaths (Figure 5.3), there have recently been a number of *high-intensity conflicts*—those causing 1,000 or more reported battle deaths—recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Americas. These conflicts played a significant role in causing global battle-death tolls to triple since 2007 (Figure 5.2).

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest number of non-state conflicts and the highest battle-death toll from non-state conflicts. However, conflicts between drug cartels in the Americas have recently grown both more numerous and more deadly. This caused the region, as of the year 2011, to surpass Central and South Asia as the region with the second-highest cumulative battle-death toll for the period 1989 to 2011 (Figure 5.6). The average conflict in the Americas seems to have become deadlier over the last few years compared with earlier years in the dataset—a trend that stands in stark contrast with trends in other regions (Figures 5.4 and 5.5).



Conflicts between drug cartels in the Americas have recently grown both more numerous and more deadly.

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Figure 5.1 Global Trends in Non-State Conflicts, 1989–2011

Globally, the number of non-state armed conflicts has been increasing since 2010, with 38 conflicts recorded in 2011. This trend was driven primarily by changes in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa. Conflicts in the Americas more than doubled between 2009 and 2010, remaining at that level in 2011. Despite declining in 2010, the number of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa rose sharply in 2011.

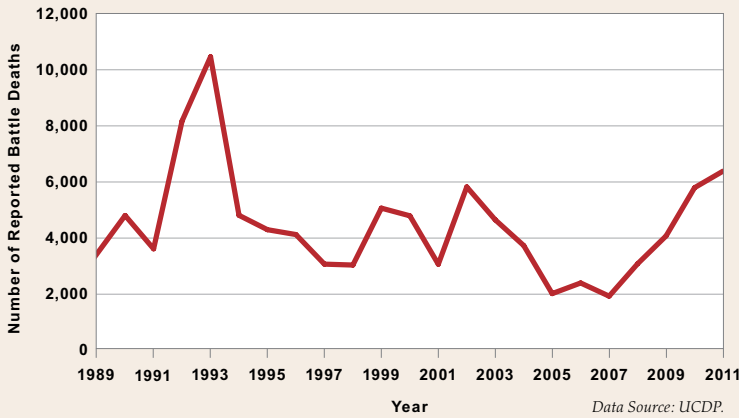
Non-state conflicts are often short-lived. The majority end within a year of the onset of violence.

Because non-state conflicts can erupt and end very quickly, the year-to-year fluctuations themselves do not tell us much about long-term trends. For example, it is impossible to say whether this recent spike is the start of a long-term increase or simply a result of the volatility in the yearly data. On

the whole, however, there appears to have been an uneven long-term increase in non-state conflicts since 1989. This trend could be an artifact of the rising interest in—and thus increased reporting on—non-state conflicts over time. But it could also mean that clashes between non-state groups are occurring more frequently.

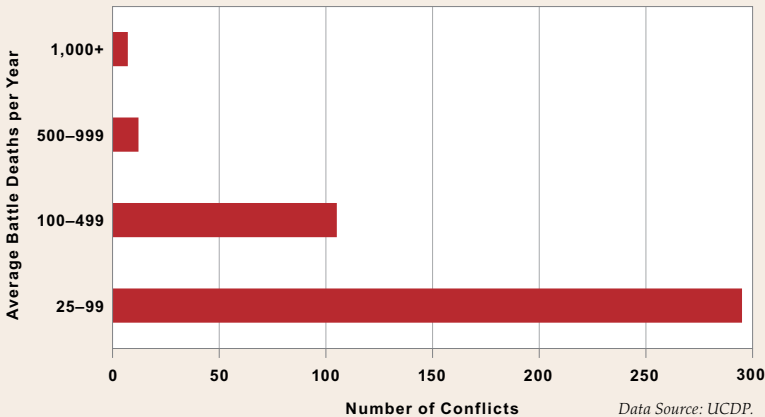
Many channels exist through which international actors can try to resolve state-based conflicts.²⁵ However, the same level of support does not normally exist for non-state conflicts. One reason may be that in many cases the conflicts are not seen by the government and the international community as substantial threats to state or international security. This is partly because non-state conflicts are often short lived, with the majority ending within a year of the onset of violence. Moreover, the average non-state conflict causes relatively few battle deaths compared with the average state-based conflict. In 2011, for example, the average non-state conflict caused some 170 deaths, while the average state-based conflict caused around 600 deaths.

Figure 5.2 Global Battle Deaths from Non-State Conflicts, 1989–2011

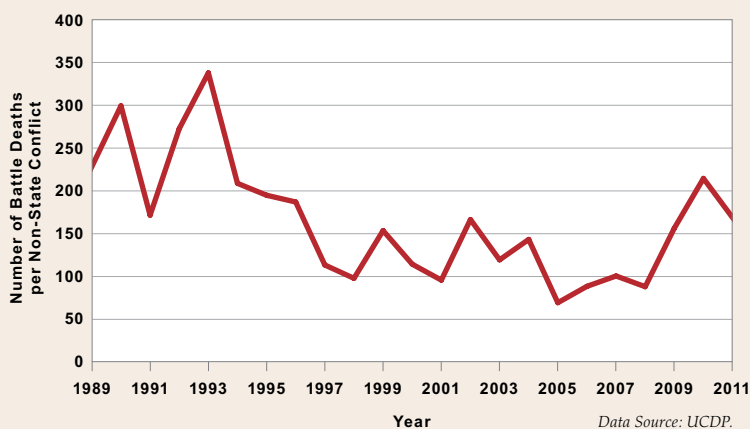


Battle deaths from non-state armed conflicts increased more than threefold from 2007 to 2011. A significant decline in battle deaths between 2009 and 2010 in sub-Saharan Africa was more than offset by a sharp increase in the Americas. The battle-death toll in the Americas reached historically high levels in 2010 and 2011—a result of the deadly drug cartel violence in Mexico. In sub-Saharan Africa battle deaths increased once again in 2011, mainly due to conflicts in Sudan and Nigeria.

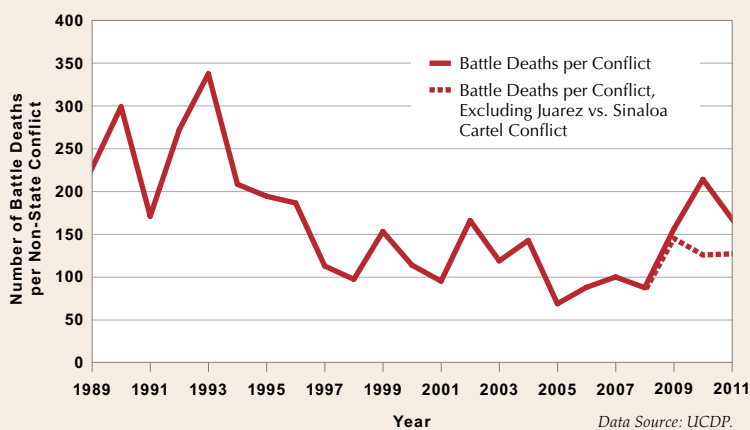
Figure 5.3 Non-State Conflicts by Severity, 1989–2011



For the most part, as we have indicated in previous publications, non-state armed conflicts tend to result in much lower battle-death tolls than their state-based counterparts. The overwhelming majority of non-state conflicts cause relatively low death tolls, while a handful of very deadly conflicts claim a much higher than average number of victims. Seventy percent of conflicts recorded since 1989 have resulted in an average of fewer than 100 deaths per year.

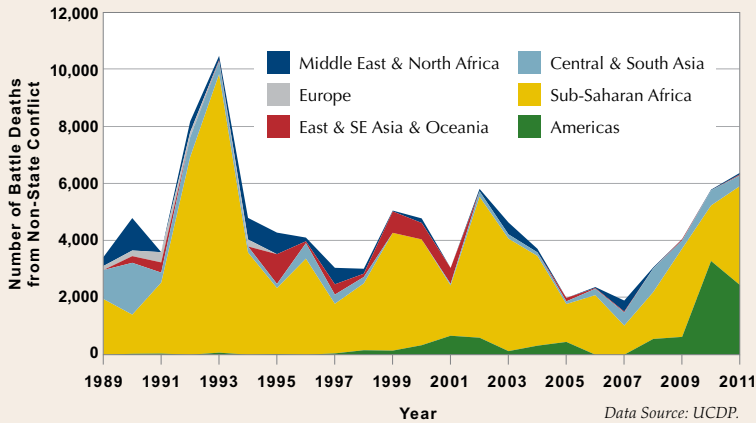
Figure 5.4 Battle Deaths per Non-State Conflict, 1989–2011

The 2000s saw fewer instances of non-state armed conflicts that cause 1,000 or more battle deaths per year than the 1990s. Recently, however, there has been a spike in battle deaths per conflict. These peaks are often driven by a small number of very deadly conflicts. In the last two years of the data, only two conflicts caused 1,000 or more battle deaths—one in Mexico in 2010 and 2011, and the other in Sudan in 2011.

Figure 5.5 The Deadliest Non-State Conflict and the Global Trend, 1989–2011

To illustrate the effect of a particularly deadly non-state armed conflict on global trends, take the example of the conflict between the Juarez and Sinaloa cartels in Mexico, coded as active in the UCDP data starting in 2008. This single conflict accounted for 44 percent and 26 percent of global battle deaths in 2010 and 2011, respectively.²⁶ The global trend in deaths per non-state armed conflict is remarkably different if we exclude this conflict, as shown by the dotted line.

Figure 5.6 Trends in Battle Deaths from Non-State Conflict, by Region, 1989–2011



From 1991 to 2009 battle deaths from non-state armed conflict were concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, while the Americas saw markedly lower battle-death tolls. In 2010, however, conflicts between drug cartels led to a spike in the death toll in the Americas. Nearly 60 percent of the global battle-death total in 2010 was recorded in the Americas, while the share for sub-Saharan Africa—despite remaining high

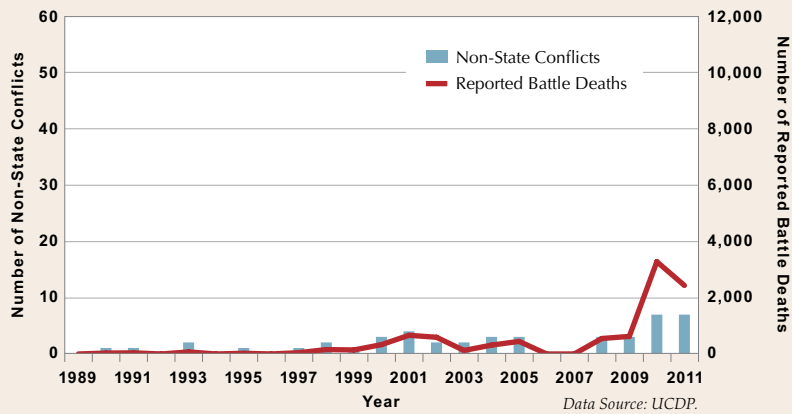
Nearly 60 percent of the 2010 global battle-death total was recorded in the Americas, due to conflicts between drug cartels.

in absolute numbers—was the lowest recorded for this region since 1990.

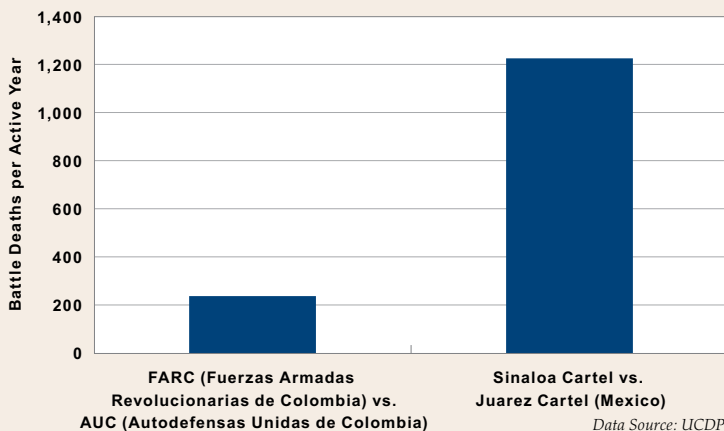
However, the resumption of two non-state conflicts—one between ethnic groups in Sudan and the other between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria—caused battle deaths in sub-Saharan Africa to once again rise in 2011.

Despite the slight decline in battle-death tolls coded in the Americas in 2011, this region remains a deadly one, with a share of global battle deaths that is larger than it had been in any previous year in the data except 2010.

The substantial impact of the recent spike in battle deaths in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa on the global total overshadows more positive trends in other regions. For most of the twenty-first century, the Middle East and North Africa has seen small numbers of conflicts, mostly those with low battle-death tolls. Central and South Asia, while experiencing more conflicts and battle deaths than the Middle East and North Africa, has also seen a modest decline in battle deaths over the last few years. And death tolls in Europe and in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania have consistently been among the lowest of all the regions in recent years.

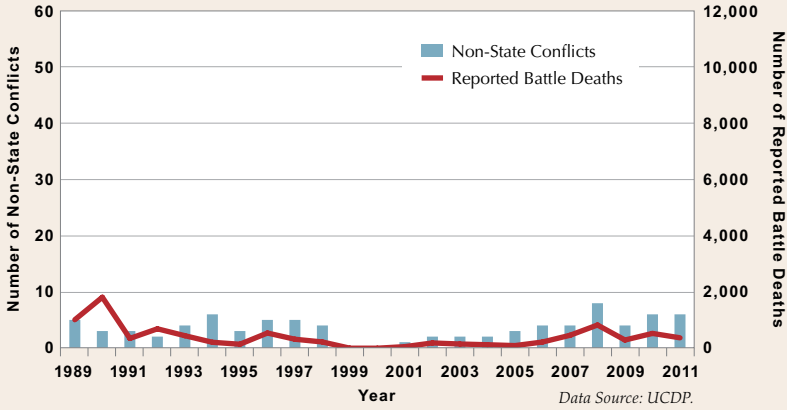
Figure 5.7 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths in the Americas, 1989–2011

The number of non-state armed conflicts increased from three to seven in the Americas between 2009 and 2010, remaining at that level in 2011. The Americas also surpassed Central and South Asia in 2011 as the region with the second-highest total number of non-state battle deaths between 1989 and 2011. The increase was a result of the recent escalation of cartel violence in Mexico. For a detailed look at the Mexican drug conflicts and different data sources, see Chapter 2 of this *Report*.

Figure 5.8 Deadly Non-State Conflicts in the Americas, 1989–2011

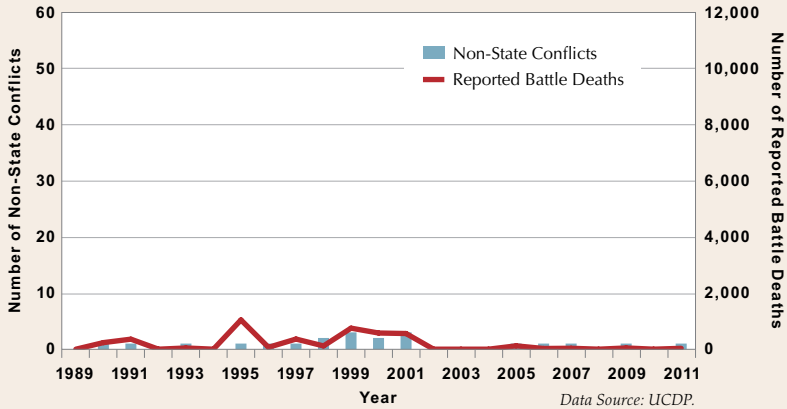
The longest non-state armed conflict coded in the Americas—that between FARC and AUC in Colombia from 1997 to 2005—had until recently been the region’s most deadly. After this conflict subsided, cartel violence in Mexico began to increase. The deadliest of these conflicts, that between the Sinaloa and Juarez cartels, caused five times as many battle deaths in an average year as did the conflict between FARC and AUC.²⁷

Figure 5.9 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths in Central and South Asia, 1989–2011

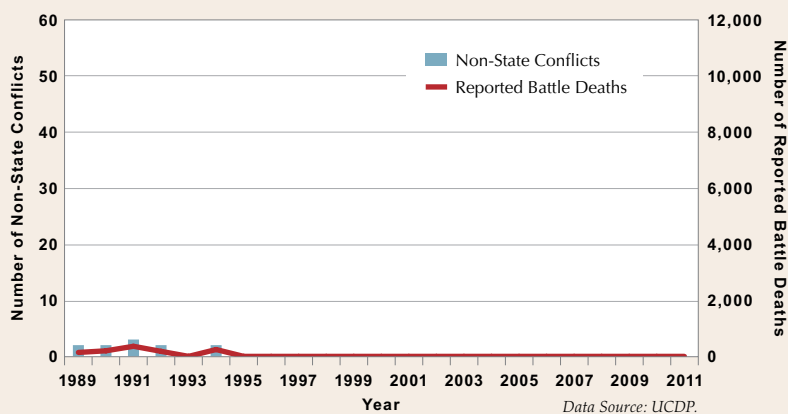


From 1989 to 2011 non-state conflicts and deaths were concentrated in Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. In 2011 the majority of conflicts in the region took place in Pakistan, where clashes between factions of the Taliban Movement of Pakistan (TTP) and other groups have increased since the late 2000s. Low-level fighting between the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic Party of Afghanistan was recorded in 2010 and 2011.

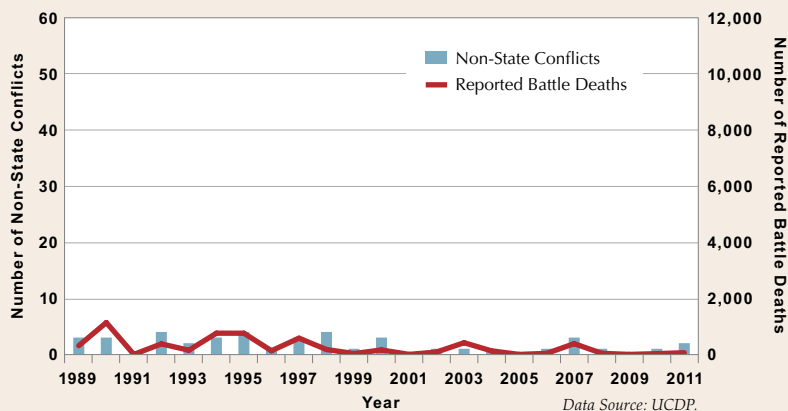
Figure 5.10 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, 1989–2011



This region saw the second-lowest number of non-state conflicts and battle deaths in the world between 1989 and 2011. The relatively higher death tolls in the mid- to late 1990s and early 2000s were due in part to fighting between non-state groups in Burma and Indonesia. Since 2002 the region has seen few to no conflicts. In 2011 the one active conflict took place in the Philippines between Islamist rebel groups.

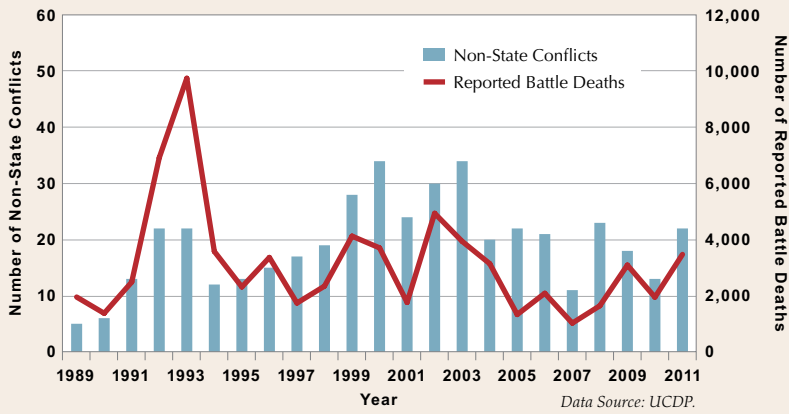
Figure 5.11 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths in Europe, 1989–2011

Europe had the lowest number of non-state armed conflicts and battle deaths of all the regions between 1989 and 2011. The conflicts that did take place occurred in the immediate post-Cold War period in the former Yugoslavia and in Russia (USSR). Although organized violence in the state-based conflict and one-sided violence categories continues to be recorded, there has been no non-state armed conflict coded in this region since 1995.

Figure 5.12 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths in the Middle East and North Africa, 1989–2011

This region generally saw fewer non-state armed conflicts and battle deaths in the 2000s than in earlier years in the data. The two conflicts recorded in 2011 were related to the Arab Spring. In Syria supporters of President Bashar al-Assad clashed with opponents of the regime. In Egypt conflict broke out between Copts and Muslims when long-standing tensions escalated in the wake of the regime change.

**Figure 5.13 Non-State Conflicts and Battle Deaths
in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2011**



Sub-Saharan Africa remained the region with the most non-state armed conflicts and battle deaths, although the average conflict in the region from the mid-2000s onward tended to be somewhat less deadly than those in earlier years. Within the region, conflicts and battle deaths were concentrated in a few countries. Nigeria, Sudan, and Somalia accounted for the vast majority of battle deaths in 2010 and 2011.



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CHAPTER 6

Deadly Assaults on Civilians

As explained in the Introduction, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) collects data on *one-sided violence* or, in other words, the use of force by an organized armed group, be it a government or non-state group, which results in the deaths of civilians. A campaign of one-sided violence is recorded whenever violence against civilians committed by one group results in at least 25 reported deaths in a calendar year.²⁸

In the *Human Security Report 2012*, we noted that the number of campaigns of one-sided violence in 2009 was at its lowest level for the whole period covered by the data at that time, 1989 to 2009. In 2010 the number of campaigns was the same as that in 2009—19 campaigns. The global total rose again in 2011 to 23 campaigns but remained lower than during the period from 1989 to 2008 (Figure 6.1).²⁹

Deaths resulting from one-sided violence nearly halved between 2009 and 2010, despite the fact that both years had the same number of campaigns.

Deaths resulting from one-sided violence nearly halved between 2009 and 2010, despite the fact that both years had the same number of campaigns (Figure 6.3). This was due primarily to a sharp decline in the number of deaths perpetrated by government and non-state actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); the Rwandan Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR); and the government of the DRC. The decline in overall global deaths, however, was followed by an increase in 2011 to almost the same level of deaths as in 2009.

Given the events in 2011 associated with the Arab Spring, it is noteworthy that the global reported death toll for 2011 was not even higher than it turned out to be. This was in part because significant declines in other regions partially offset the global effect of the 2011 increase in the Middle East and North Africa. The 2010 decline in deaths from one-sided violence in sub-Saharan Africa noted above led to lower death tolls that were basically sustained in 2011, with only a slight increase in fatalities. In addition, the death toll in Central and South Asia dropped by more than half from 2010 to 2011 (Figure 6.4).

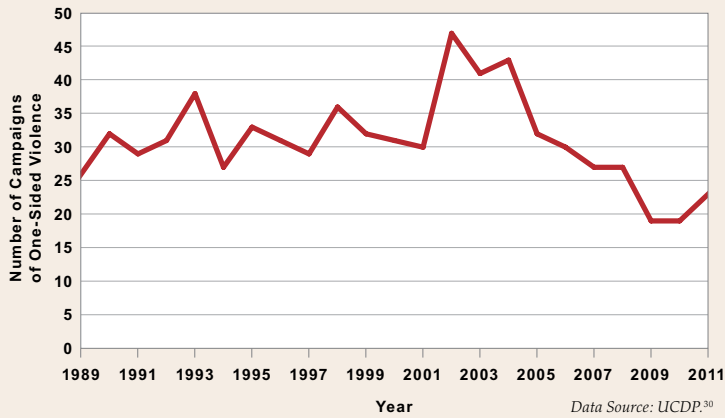
Whether the numbers will stay at these relatively low levels remains, of course, to be seen. If violence related to the Arab Spring, especially in Syria, continues, there could be further increases at the global level unless violence in other high-fatality regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia continues to drop.

Confirming our finding from the *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, we show below that, overall, governments perpetrate a smaller and smaller share of deaths from one-sided violence recorded around the world (Figure 6.5). Conversely, the share of deaths perpetrated by non-state actors has increased. But the share of deaths perpetrated by governments rose again sharply in 2011, which serves as a powerful reminder that governments often are the greatest threats to human security when they turn against their own citizens. The destructive power of state forces is usually much greater than that of non-state groups.

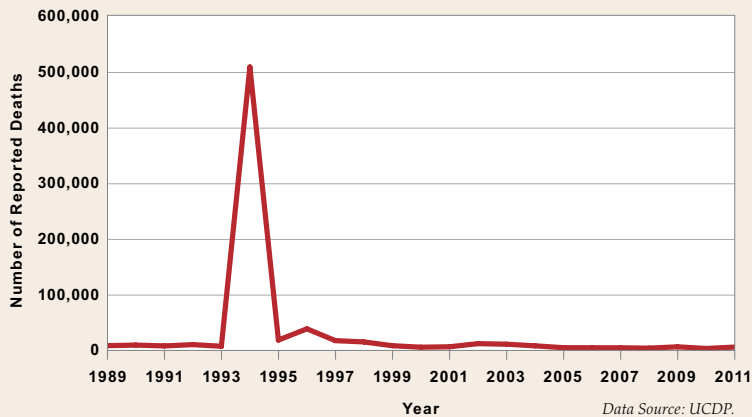


Governments often
are the greatest
threats to human
security when they
turn against their
own citizens.

Dreamstime.

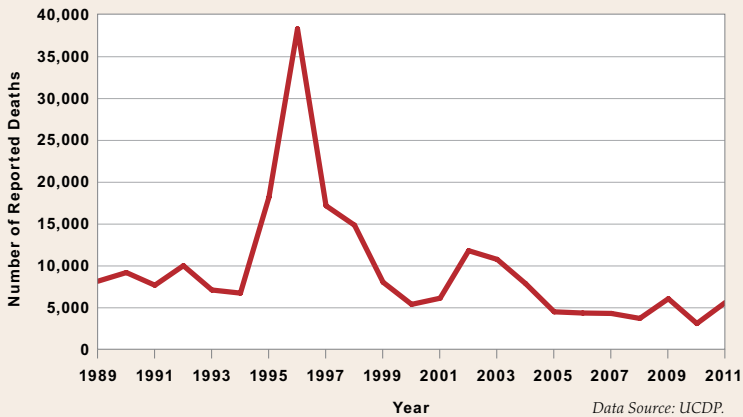
Figure 6.1 Global Trends in Campaigns of One-Sided Violence, 1989–2011

In 2011, 23 campaigns of one-sided violence were recorded worldwide, which is similar to 1989—the first year covered by the data—when the global total stood at 26. However, there was a sharp increase in campaigns of more than half from 2001 to 2002 that was not reversed until 2006. This peak was driven by increases in sub-Saharan Africa and to a lesser extent in Central and South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and East and Southeast Asia and Oceania.

Figure 6.2 Global Deaths from One-Sided Violence, 1989–2011

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was by far the highest-fatality campaign of one-sided violence during the time period covered by the data. More than 500,000 people were killed over the course of a few months. The number of deaths in this instance was so high that its peak obscures the variation in most other years from 1989 to 2011. The smaller peak discernible in this graph in 1996 is the result of violence in the DRC that was indirectly related to the Rwandan genocide.

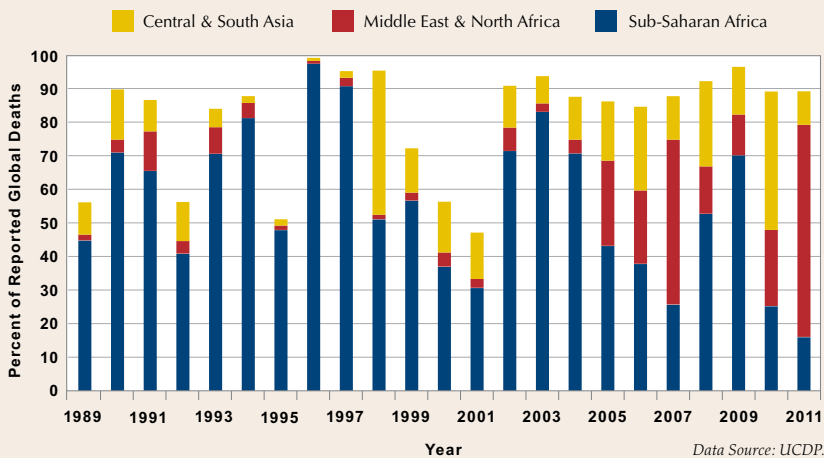
Figure 6.3 Global Deaths from One-Sided Violence, 1989–2011, Excluding the Rwandan Genocide



Note: This graph excludes all deaths occurring in Rwanda in 1994.

Despite the upsurge of deaths in 2011 due mostly to events related to the Arab Spring, deaths from one-sided violence have declined overall during the period covered by the data. Even excluding the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, average annual death tolls in the 1990s were more than double those seen since the year 2000.

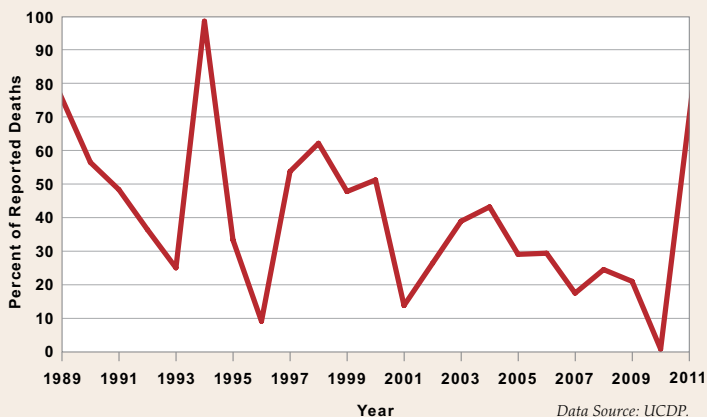
Figure 6.4 Trends in Deaths from One-Sided Violence in the Most Severely Affected Regions, 1989–2011



Note: This graph excludes all deaths occurring in Rwanda in 1994.

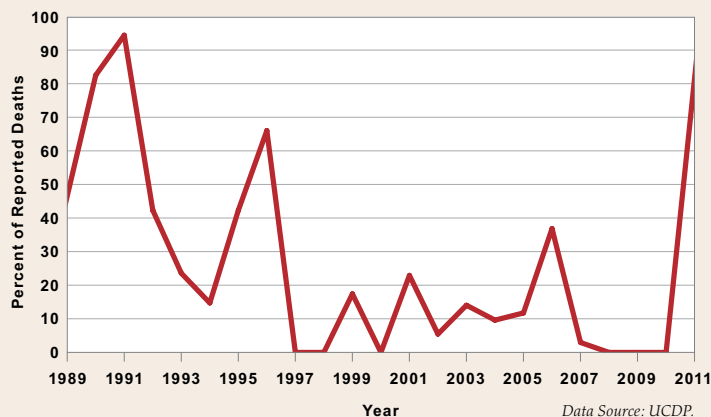
As the death toll in sub-Saharan Africa declined unevenly, deaths from one-sided violence in Central and South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa took up a greater share of the global total after 2004. Sub-Saharan Africa saw the highest regional death toll in all but four of the 23 years covered by the data.

Figure 6.5 Share of Deaths from One-Sided Violence Perpetrated by Governments, 1989–2011



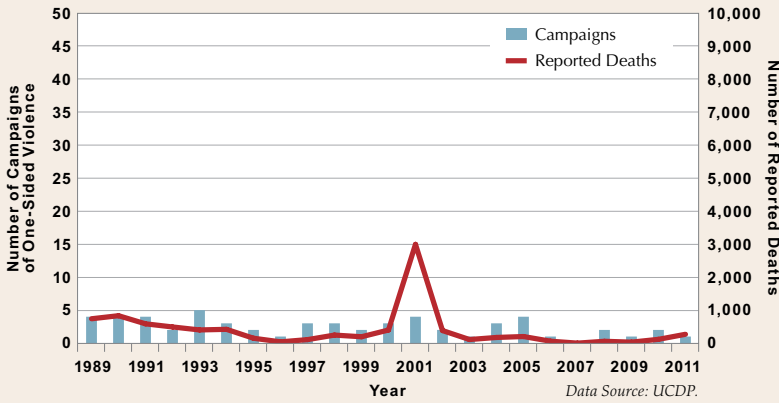
We noted in previous reports that non-state armed groups are perpetrating increasing shares of global one-sided violence. In 2010 non-state armed groups were responsible for nearly all deaths. However, governments perpetrated 70 percent of deaths from one-sided violence in 2011, deviating from the trend shown in the graph, especially in the 2000s.

Figure 6.6 Share of Deaths from One-Sided Violence Perpetrated by Governments in the Middle East and North Africa, 1989–2011



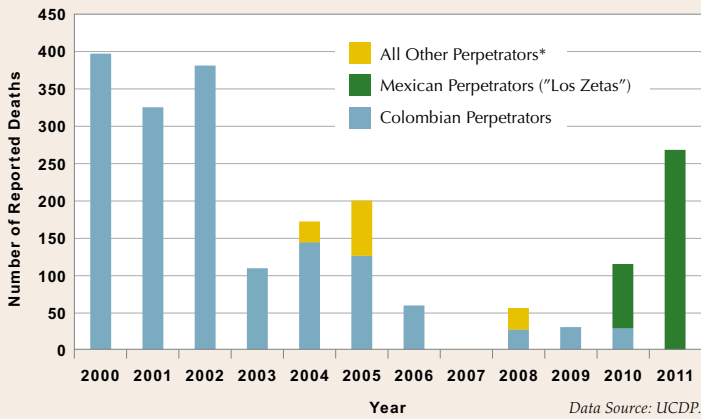
Much of the increase in the share of global one-sided violence perpetrated by governments seen in 2011 was driven by events associated with the Arab Spring; these events serve as stark reminders that the consequences tend to be dire when the power of the state is used against its citizens. Governments almost always have more resources and geographical reach than non-state armed groups.

Figure 6.7 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in the Americas, 1989–2011



In the Americas, deaths from one-sided violence spiked in 2001 as a result of the 9/11 attacks in the US. In 2010 and 2011, however, the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas perpetrated an increasing number of civilian deaths. This group was responsible for all one-sided violence in the region in 2011 and for one of the two recorded campaigns in 2010.³¹

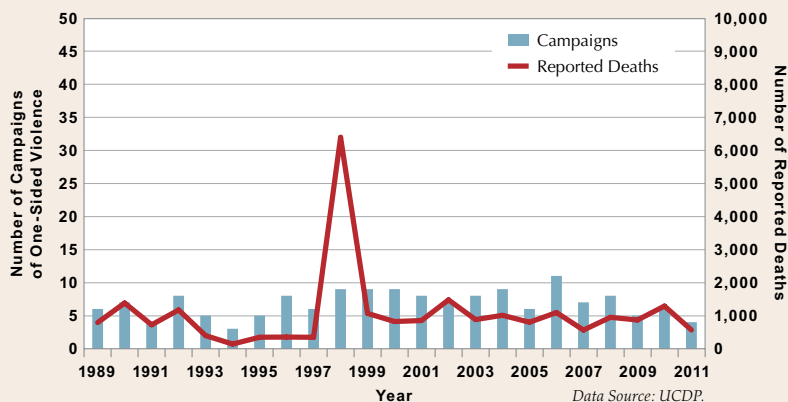
Figure 6.8 Perpetrators of One-Sided Violence in the Americas, 2000–2011



*Note: This graph excludes deaths from the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

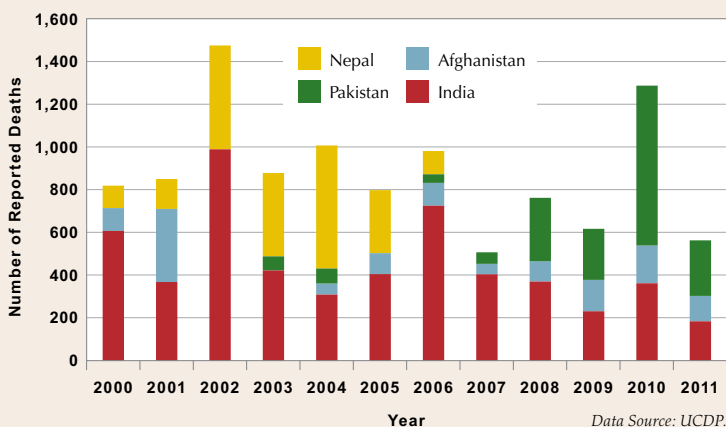
A large share of the recorded one-sided violence in the Americas from 2000 onwards was perpetrated by either Colombian or Mexican actors. The number of civilians killed by Colombian rebel groups declined, while violence perpetrated by the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas increased. The number of civilians killed by Mexican cartels was likely much higher than the level indicated in this graph; Chapter 2 of this Report discusses data on cartel violence in Mexico in depth.

Figure 6.9 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in Central and South Asia, 1989–2011



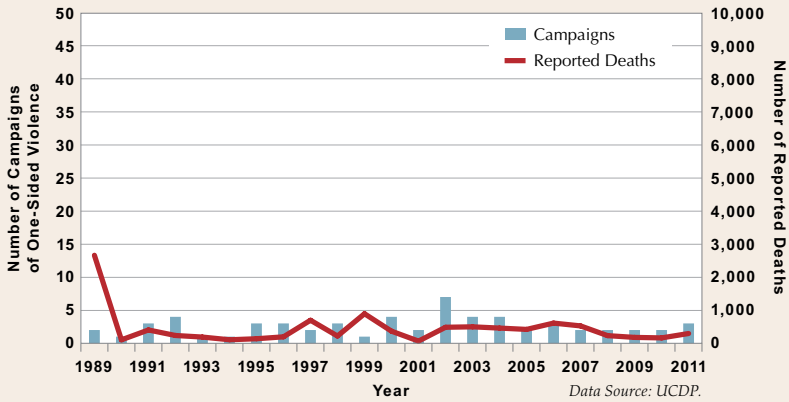
In Central and South Asia, the Afghan Taliban was responsible for the spike in deaths in 1998. Lower death tolls in campaigns perpetrated by the same group contributed to the regional decline in deaths from one-sided violence in 2011. Therik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Pakistan, and the Maoist Communist Party of India (CPI-M) also perpetrated fewer deaths in 2011 compared with 2010.

Figure 6.10 Deaths from One-Sided Violence in Worst-Affected Countries of Central and South Asia, 2000–2011



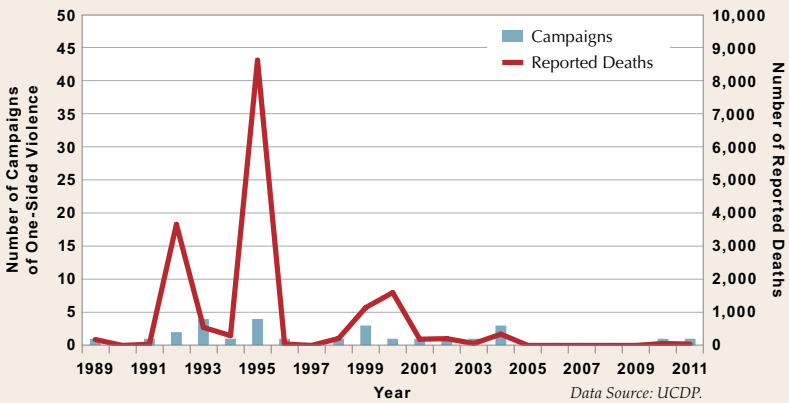
Despite the large amount of international attention focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, India had among the most substantial death tolls from one-sided violence in the region in almost every year. Nepal also witnessed high levels of one-sided violence—but, despite difficulties with the peace process, there has been no resurgence of large-scale one-sided violence since the end of the civil war in 2006.

Figure 6.11 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, 1989–2011



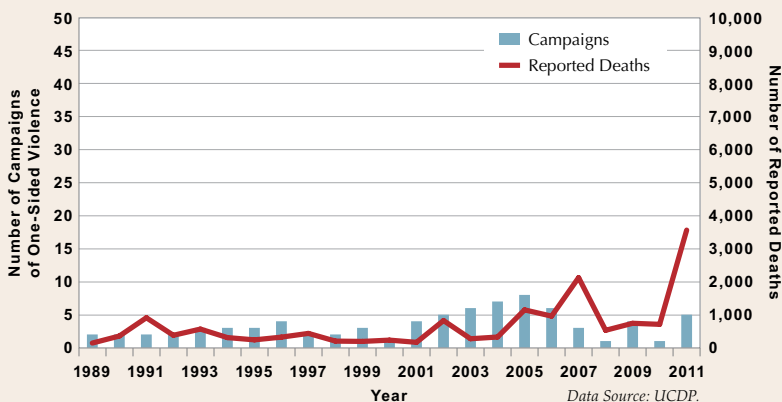
In East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, the death toll from one-sided violence increased in 2011 primarily due to campaigns by the government of Burma. In addition, the government of Vietnam killed 72 protesters from the Hmong ethnic group in the spring of 2011 who were demonstrating against the discrimination they faced and demanding land and religion-oriented reforms.

Figure 6.12 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in Europe, 1989–2011



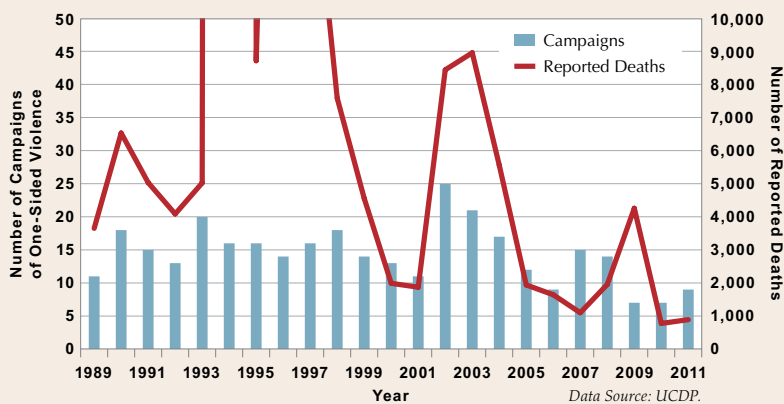
Europe witnessed little or no one-sided violence since the end of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and the height of the conflict in Chechnya in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Yet, the Caucasus—where Chechnya is located—saw a low-level resurgence of violence against civilians in 2010 and 2011. In both years, the perpetrator was the Forces of the Caucasus Emirate, a new rebel group that extended the scope of the Chechen conflict to the region of the North Caucasus.

Figure 6.13 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in the Middle East and North Africa, 1989–2011



The only one-sided violence in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011 that was not related to the Arab Spring was perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Many of the ISI's attacks are against Shia Muslims, often carried out in the midst of religious gatherings or events. The ISI also attacks civilians who are suspected of cooperating with the Iraqi government or international agencies.

Figure 6.14 One-Sided Violence Campaigns and Deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2011



Following a more than twofold increase in 2009, deaths from one-sided violence in sub-Saharan Africa decreased dramatically in 2010, and rose only slightly in 2011. Death tolls in the region have risen and fallen sharply since 1989, but they display an overall downward trend. In the last two years, this region saw its lowest levels of deaths from one-sided violence in the period covered by the data.

PART II

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 3

- 1 Although Arab Spring–related protests took place in several more countries than we discuss here, we focus only on those in which the level and nature of violence met the criteria for inclusion in UCDP data.
- 2 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2012b, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_battle-related_deaths_dataset/; UCDP, Non-State Conflict Dataset v2.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_non-state_conflict_dataset/; UCDP, One-Sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2012, 1989–2011, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_one-sided_violence_dataset/.
- 3 UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, “Syria,” http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=150®ionSelect=10-Middle_East.
- 4 In order to meet the criteria for coding in UCDP’s data on *organized violence*, groups involved in either a conflict or involved in perpetrating one-sided violence against civilians must be formally organized. A *formally organized group*, according to the definition used by the UCDP, is “[a]ny non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force.” For *non-state conflict*, that is, two or more non-governmental groups fighting against each other, UCDP does not require the announcement of a name, but in the absence thereof, uses other information to determine the level of organization. In those cases, the activity of the group in question must demonstrate other characteristics that indicate a significant level of organization, such as “a clear pattern of incidents which are connected, or ... evidence that violence was planned in advance” (see UCDP, “Definitions,” http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#One-sided_violence). The UCDP’s strict coding rules require a high level of confidence in, and corroboration of, any information that is included in its data. The UCDP also provides three levels of death estimates: low, best, and high. Any events whose details cannot be confirmed to this high level of confidence are excluded from UCDP’s best estimates, though they may be included in the high estimates.
- 5 UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, “Yemen (North Yemen),” http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=169®ionSelect=10-Middle_East#.
- 6 Bill Roggio, “US kills AQAP leaders in airstrike in southern Yemen: report,” *The Long War Journal*, 9 June 2011, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/us_kills_mid-level_a.php.
- 7 Roggio, “US kills AQAP leaders.” See also Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Tara Vassefi, “Perceptions of the ‘Arab Spring’ Within the Salafi-Jihadi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35, no. 12, (2012): 838, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2012.720241.
- 8 See endnote 4.

- 9 Personal e-mail communication with Therése Pettersson, 4 December 2012; UCDP Conflict Database, "The Tunisian Uprising," <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/info/The%20Tunisian%20Uprising.pdf>; UCDP Conflict Database, "Egypt and the Arab Spring," <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/info/Egypt%20and%20the%20Arab%20Spring.pdf>.
- 10 William Booth, Karin Brulliard, and Abigail Hauslohner, "Salafists Urge Ultraconservative Islam on post-Arab Spring Governments," *Washington Post*, 6 October 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-10-06/world/35499304_1_salafists-islamic-law-islamists. See also "And the Winner Is ..." *The Economist*, 10 December 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21541404>; Michael Scott Doran, "The Heirs of Nasser," in *The New Arab Revolt*, ed. Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011), 9; Daniel Byman, "Terrorism after the Revolutions," in *The New Arab Revolt*, ed. Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).
- 11 Abdullah Al-Arian, "The Logic behind Egypt's New Authoritarianism," *Al-Jazeera*, 5 December 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/12/2012124111437225259.html>.
- 12 "Mali coup: Arab Spring Spreads to Africa," *United Press International*, 26 March 2012, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2012/03/26/Mali-coup-Arab-Spring-spreads-to-Africa/UPI-33131332791728/?spt=hs&or=tn.
- 13 "Mali Tuareg Rebels Control Timbuktu as Troops Flee," *BBC News*, 1 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17576725>.
- 14 International Crisis Group, "Mali: Avoiding Escalation," Africa Report No. 189, 18 July 2012, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation-english.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation-english.pdf).
- 15 "France Confirms Mali Military Intervention," *BBC News*, 11 January 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20991719>.

CHAPTER 4

- 16 As with other types of organized violence discussed in this *Report*, a *state-based conflict* is coded in a given calendar year if it results in 25 or more reported battle deaths in that year. Ralph Sundberg, *UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset Codebook*, Version 5.0 (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2012), http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/120/120451_codebook-ucdp-battle-related-deaths-dataset-v.5-2012.pdf.
- 17 Although Yemen was one of the countries affected by the Arab Spring, a conflict between the government of Yemen (supported by the United States and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP]) has been ongoing since 2009, well before the uprisings in the Middle East began in 2011. However, as we explain in more detail in our discussion of the Arab Spring, there is some indication that fighting intensified because of the turmoil caused by the Arab Spring protests.
- 18 For more discussion of Islamist political violence and the US-led international campaign against it, see the *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–161.
- 19 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden/Centre for the Study of Civil War, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), *Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2012*, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_prio_armed_conflict_dataset.
- 20 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, *Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2012*, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_battle-related_deaths_dataset/.
- 21 Human Security Report Project (HSRP), “Persistent Armed Conflict: An Increasing Threat?” in *Human Security Report 2012: Sexual Violence, Education, and War: Beyond the Mainstream Narrative* (Vancouver: Human Security Press, 2012), 180.

CHAPTER 5

- 22 As is with other types of organized violence discussed in this *Report*, a *non-state conflict* is coded in a given calendar year if it causes 25 or more reported battle deaths in that year.
- 23 For a more in-depth discussion of the distinction between levels of organization in non-state groups, see the box “Comparing Non-State Armed Groups” in our 2012 *Report*. Human Security Report Project (HSRP), *Human Security Report 2012: Sexual Violence, Education, and War: Beyond the Mainstream Narrative* (Vancouver: Human Security Press, 2012), 188.
- 24 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, Non-State Conflict Dataset v.2.4-2012, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_non-state_conflict_dataset/.
- 25 It is possible that local NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other community organizations have been involved in helping to mitigate disputes or resolve conflicts between non-state groups, but little information on such endeavours is available.
- 26 Other conflicts between drug cartels in Mexico were also deadlier than most non-state armed conflicts. Here we provide only one example for illustrative purposes.
- 27 Note that UCDP data on organized violence between drug cartels in Mexico tend to significantly undercount the death tolls. Indeed, deaths from the conflict between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Juarez Cartel may be far higher, as data from the Trans-Border Institute suggest. We discuss the reasons why UCDP data do not capture much of the violence between drug cartels in “...” on page 56.

CHAPTER 6

- 28 Therése Pettersson, *One-Sided Violence Codebook v 1.4* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2012), 2, http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/120/120463_ucdp-one-sided-violence-dataset-codebook-v.1.4-2012.pdf.
- 29 Since the publication of the *Human Security Report 2012*, there has been a change in the way the Human Security Report Project (HSRP) defines a campaign of one-sided violence. Previously, we counted separate campaigns in the relatively few cases where a single group killed 25 or more civilians in more than one country in a calendar year. From now on, however, we consider civilian deaths perpetrated in one calendar year in different countries, but by the same actor, as part of one campaign of one-sided violence. We examined the effect of this coding change on the trends presented in this publication versus those presented in previous publications and confirmed that this led only to a very small difference in the number of campaigns, which does not affect the overall trend. Moreover, we confirmed that the annual revision process undertaken by UCDP of all their data on organized violence accounts for a greater difference in the number of campaigns than did the change to the definition.
- 30 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, *One-Sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2012, 1989–2011*, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_one-sided_violence_dataset/.
- 31 The perpetrator of the other campaign in 2010 was the Colombian rebel group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

THE FOCUS OF 2013 *HUMAN SECURITY REPORT* IS THE GROWING DEBATE OVER WHETHER THE LONG-TERM THREAT OF VIOLENCE—WAR, TERRORISM, HOMICIDE—HAS BEEN DECREASING OR INCREASING WORLDWIDE.

For some the answer seems clear. In February 2012, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that today's world has become, "more dangerous than it has ever been." Similar beliefs are widely held throughout the strategic community. There, however, is little hard evidence to support them.

During 2012—the most recent year for which there are data—the number of conflicts being waged around the world dropped sharply, from 37 to 32. High-intensity conflicts have declined by more than half since the end of the Cold War, while terrorism, genocide and homicide numbers are also down.

And this is not simply a recent phenomenon. According to a major 2011 study by Harvard University's Steven Pinker, violence of all kinds has been declining for *thousands* of years. Indeed Pinker claims that, "we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species' existence."

The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined has won Pinker widespread critical acclaim for its scope, originality and scholarship. But some of its factual assertions, and the arguments used to support them, have been subject to sustained—and sometimes deeply hostile—criticism.

Critics have disputed Pinker's two core assertions—that the current era is unprecedentedly peaceful, *and* that the earliest human societies had dramatically higher rates of deadly violence than those of today. Against Pinker they argue that the twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history, while the early human societies were extraordinarily peaceful.

Part I of the 2013 *Human Security Report—The Decline in Global Violence: Evidence, Explanation and Contestation* delivers the most comprehensive analysis to date of this critically important debate.

Part II of the *Report* reviews the data on recent changes in global and regional trends that track the incidence and deadliness of organized violence.

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