

## More Peaceful Now?

Dr. Steven Pinker has many reasons for supporting his hypothesis that this is the safest time in the history of the human species. Though it may be hard to believe, we are safer now than we've ever been. Violence has been declining for most of human history. Pinker suggests that certain historical trends have reinforced the aspects of our nature that are inclined towards peace.

Pinker suggests:

“People always think that violence has increased because they reason from memorable examples rather than from global data. If at any time you cherry-pick the most violent place in the world, then you'll discover that yes, it's violent. That has nothing to do with overall rates or trends in violence. The basic problem is that journalism is a systematically misleading way to understand the world. News is about things that happen, not about things that don't happen. You never see a reporter standing on the streets of Angola, Sri Lanka, or Vietnam saying 'I'm here reporting that a war has not broken out today.' It's only by looking at data on the world as a whole that you get an accurate picture of the trends. Objectively, there has indeed been an uptick in war deaths in 2013 compared to 2012...But the overall level of deaths is still far below those of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when the world was a far more dangerous place...the conflicts of today are far less damaging than those of past decades...”<sup>1</sup>

“We've all had the experience of reading about a bloody war or shocking crime and asking, 'What is the world coming to?' But we seldom ask, 'How bad was the world in the past?' ... Tribal warfare was nine times as deadly as war and genocide in the 20th century. The murder rate of Medieval Europe was more than thirty times what it is today. Slavery, sadistic punishments, and frivolous executions were unexceptionable features of life for millennia, then suddenly were targeted for abolition. Wars between developed countries have vanished, and even in the developing world, wars kill a fraction of the people they did a few decades ago...How could this have happened, if human nature has not changed? What led people to stop sacrificing children, stabbing each other at the dinner table,...[or] disemboweling criminals as forms of popular entertainment? The key to explaining the decline of violence...[is thanks] to the spread of government, literacy, trade, and cosmopolitanism, we increasingly control our impulses, empathize with others, bargain rather than plunder, debunk toxic ideologies, and deploy our powers of reason to reduce the temptations of violence.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[http://stevenpinker.com/files/pinker/files/has\\_the\\_decline\\_of\\_violence\\_reversed\\_since\\_the\\_better\\_angels\\_of\\_our\\_nature\\_was\\_written.pdf](http://stevenpinker.com/files/pinker/files/has_the_decline_of_violence_reversed_since_the_better_angels_of_our_nature_was_written.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Excerpted from <http://stevenpinker.com/publications/better-angels-our-nature>

Five Historical Trends allow for more peace:

1. Commerce  
In a trading economy, everybody wins and the need to “plunder” is reduced. Evolving technology increases the reach of trading communities, creating an interdependent global economy.
2. Rationality  
Knowledge and reasoning have become more central to human affairs. We are now able to understand that cycles of violence are futile, and see them as a problem to be solved.
3. Understanding  
Increasing travel (real and virtual) and cultural awareness have widened our circles of empathy and comprehension. We are less willing to fight against those we understand.
4. Feminization  
Cultures increasingly respect the values of women. Since violence is largely as male activity, cultures that empower women are less likely to be violent.
5. State  
The growth of governments and justice systems, with the right to use force when required, discourages violence.

Human Nature allows for more peace:

1. Empathy  
An ability to understand the experiences of others and align their interest with our own decreases aggression.
2. Reason  
The ability to process abstract ideas allows us to choose actions that will provide long-term benefits. Reason guides the application of empathy, self-control and morality
3. Morality  
Moral standards for behavior influence the interaction between people and cultures. Current moral standards discourage the use of violence.
4. Self-Control  
The ability to anticipate the consequences of our actions can inhibit the more destructive ones.