2. Wars and Violence

Mark Harrison
mark.harrison@warwick.ac.uk

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Wars and Violence

In this lecture we will look briefly at twentieth century warfare in the context of historical trends in violence.

There is a spectrum of violence:

Assault and homicide	→	Organized crime	→	Terrorism and civil conflict	→	Wars among states

Social scientists apply different methodologies and statistical categories to different parts of the spectrum.

But the perpetrators of violence slip easily between these categories without telling us.

This module is about just one part of the spectrum of violence, the part we call war.

- We mustn't forget the wider context of human violence.
- We'll draw on work about violence by Steven Pinker (2011) to set twentieth century warfare in this context
- On similar lines see Gat (2006), Gleditsch (2008) and Goldstein (2011).

The Violent Twentieth Century?

Organized violence in the twentieth century:

Cause	Killed, mn
World War II	55
Chinese Famine and Terror under Mao	40
Soviet Famine and Terror under Stalin	20
World War I	15
Russian Civil War	9
Chinese Civil War	3

Source: Pinker (2011: 195). Numbers killed are the median or modal figures from many sources that Pinker consulted.

- In this table the twentieth century looks very bloody.

The Violent Twentieth Century?

Organized violence in recorded history:

Cause	Century	Killed, mn	Rank
World War II	20	55	1
Chinese Famine and Terror under Mao	20	40	2
Mongol conquests	13	40	3
An Lushan Revolt	8	36	4
Fall of the Ming	17	25	5
Taiping Rebellion	19	20	6
Annihilation of American Indians	15-19	20	7
Soviet Famine and Terror under Stalin	20	20	8
Middle East slave trade	7-19	19	9
Atlantic slave trade	15-19	18	10

Source: Pinker (2011: 195).

- In this table, only three of the top ten occasions of violence by numbers killed happened in the twentieth century (with 15 million deaths World War I would have been no. 13).

The Violent Twentieth Century?

Organized violence in recorded history:

Cause	Century	Killed, mn	Rank	Normalized Rank
An Lushan Revolt	8	36	4	1
Mongol conquests	13	40	3	2
Middle East slave trade	7-19	19	9	3
Fall of the Ming	17	25	5	4
Fall of Rome	3-5	8	15	5
Tamerlane	14-15	17	11	6
Annihilation of American Indians	15-19	20	7	7
Atlantic slave trade	15-19	18	10	8
World War II	20	55	1	9
Taiping Rebellion	19	20	6	10

Source: Pinker (2011: 195). Here, numbers killed are normalized by the global population at the time before ranking.

- In this table, only one of the top ten occasions of organized violence happened in the twentieth century.

Our Bloody History

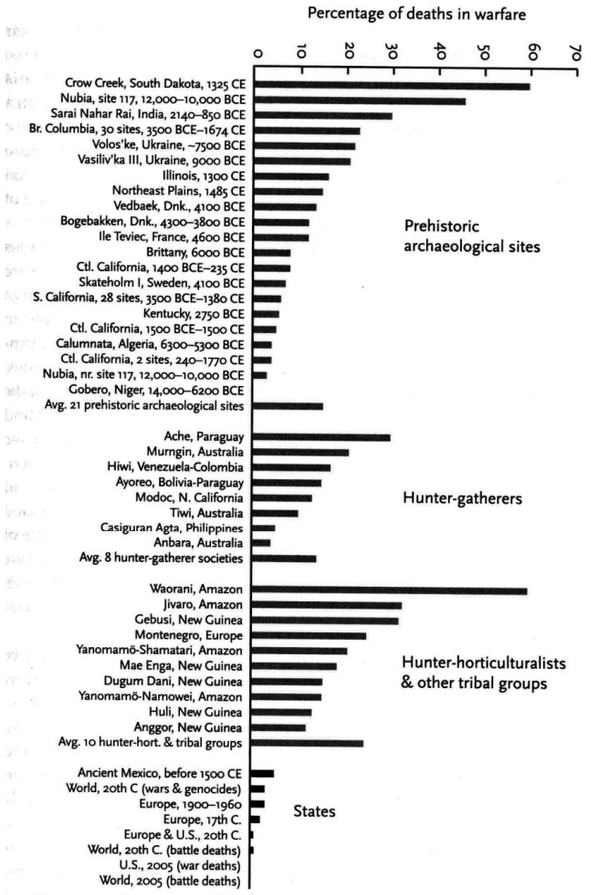

FIGURE 2–2. Percentage of deaths in warfare in nonstate and state societies

Sources: Prehistoric archaeological sites: Bowles, 2009; Keeley, 1996. Hunter-gatherers: Bowles, 2009. Hunter-horticulturalists and other tribal groups: Gat, 2006; Keeley, 1996. Ancient Mexico: Keeley, 1996. World, 20th-century wars & genocides (includes man-made famines): White, 2011. Europe, 1900–60: Keeley, 1996, from Wright, 1942, 1942/1964, 1942/1965; see note 52. Europe, 17th-century: Keeley, 1996. Europe and United States, 20th century: Keeley, 1996, from Harris, 1975. World, 20th-century battle deaths: Lacina & Gleditsch, 2005; Sarkees, 2000; see note 54. United States, 2005 war deaths: see text and note 57. World, 2005 battle deaths: see text and note 58.

This figure (Pinker 2011: 49) measures the proportion of deaths in various societies that resulted from warfare. Evidence from archaeological sites is based on bones and excludes deaths from soft tissue injuries. Evidence from societies with organized states is selected from the most violent countries and centuries.

- Hunter-gatherer and tribal communities were not idyllic or peaceable.
- Societies without organized states were far bloodier than ours.

Our Bloody History

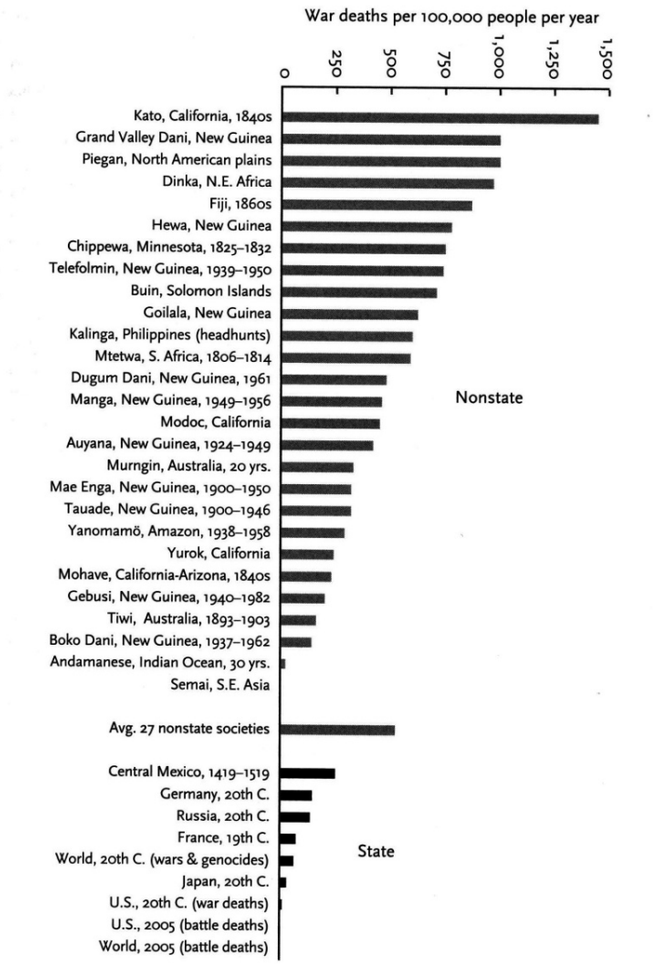

FIGURE 2–3. Rate of death in warfare in nonstate and state societies

Sources: Nonstate: Hewa and Goilala from Gat, 2006; others from Keeley, 1996. Central Mexico, Germany, Russia, France, Japan: Keeley, 1996; see notes 62 and 63. United States in the 20th century: Leland & Oboroceanu, 2010; see note 64. World in 20th century: White, 2011; see note 65. World in 2005: Human Security Report Project, 2008; see notes 57 and 58.

This figure (Pinker 2011: 53) measures deaths in various societies that resulted from warfare, relative to numbers of people alive at the time.

Evidence from archaeological sites is based on bones and excludes deaths from soft tissue injuries.

Evidence from societies with organized states is selected from the most violent countries and centuries.

- Hunter-gatherer and tribal communities were not idyllic or peaceable.
- Societies without organized states were far bloodier than ours.

Our Bloody History

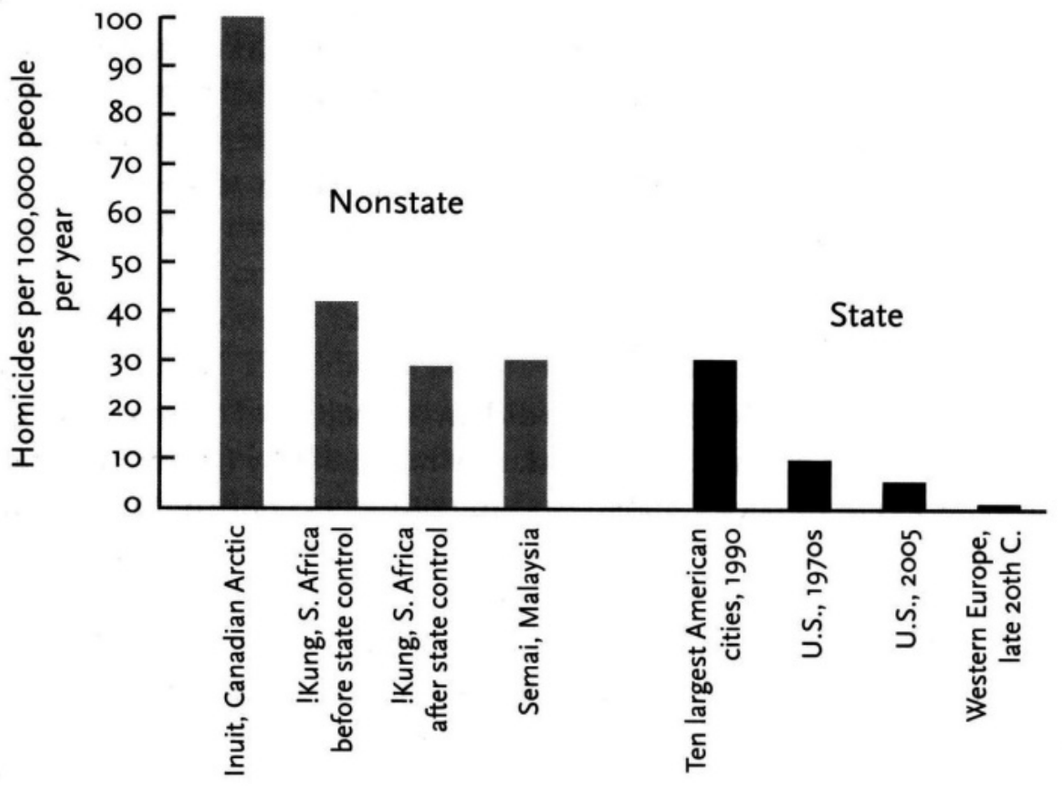

FIGURE 2–4. Homicide rates in the least violent nonstate societies compared to state societies

Sources: !Kung and Central Arctic Inuit: Gat, 2006; Lee, 1982. Semai: Knauft, 1987. Ten largest U.S. cities: Zimring, 2007, p. 140. United States: FBI Uniform Crime Reports; see note 73. Western Europe (approximation): World Health Organization; see note 66 to chap. 3, p. 701.

This figure (Pinker 2011: 55) measures homicides in the least violent non-state societies compared with state societies, relative to numbers of people alive at the time.

- The Semai are a hunting and horticulturalist tribe in Malaya "who go out of their way to avoid the use of force."
- The !Kung (South Africa) have been described as "The Harmless People."
- The Inuit (Canadian Arctic) have been described by the phrase "Never in Anger."

Our Bloody History

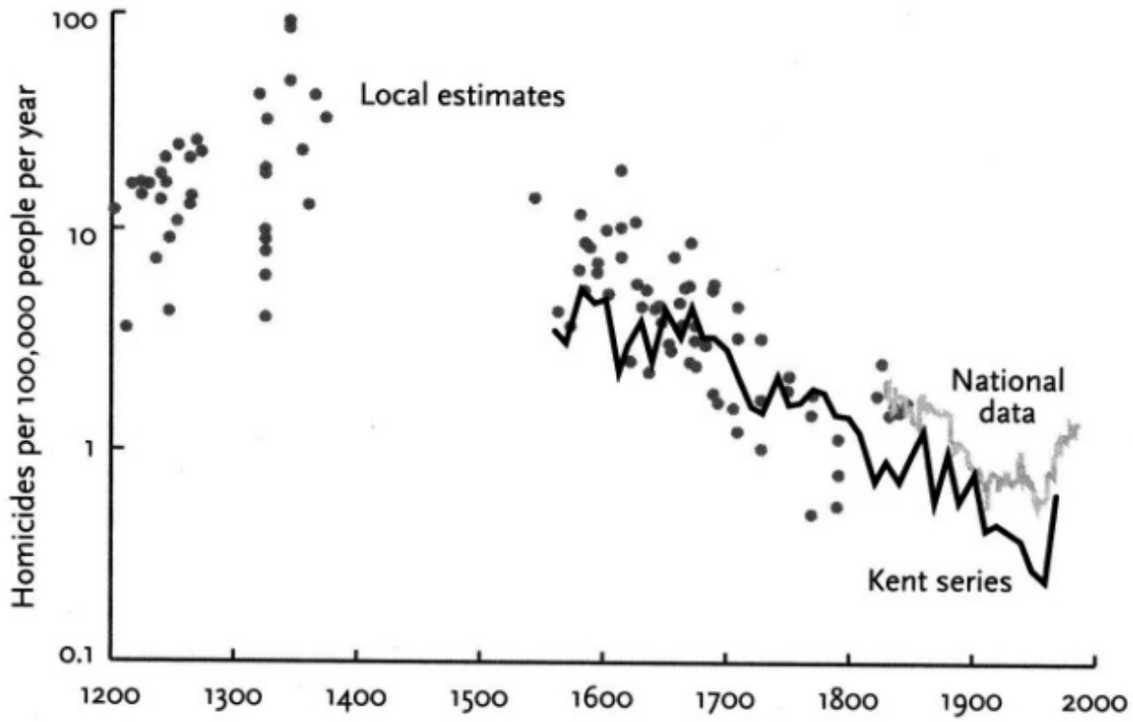

FIGURE 3–2. Homicide rates in England, 1200–2000

Source: Graph from Eisner, 2003.

This figure (Pinker 2011: 61) measures homicide rates in England since 1200, relative to numbers of people alive at the time.

- Any selection bias is likely to understate homicides in earlier years.

Our Bloody History

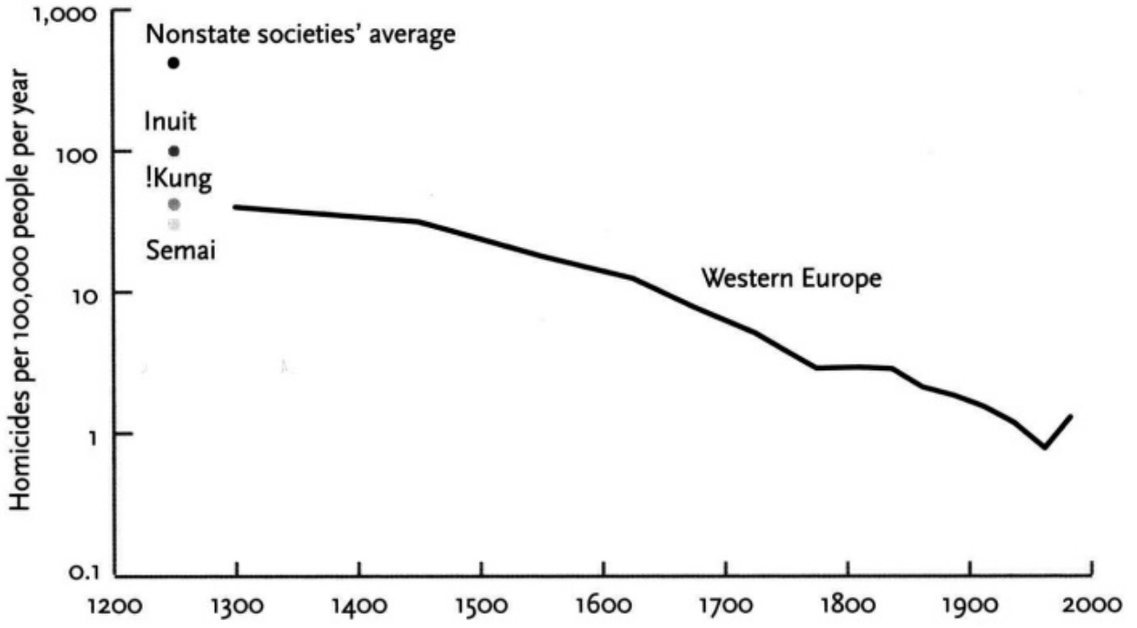

FIGURE 3–4. Homicide rates in Western Europe, 1300–2000, and in nonstate societies

Sources: Nonstate (geometric mean of 26 societies, not including Semai, Inuit, and !Kung): see figure 2–3. Europe: Eisner, 2003, table 1; geometric mean of five regions; missing data interpolated.

This figure (Pinker 2011: 61) measures homicide rates in Western Europe (England, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia) since 1200, relative to numbers of people alive at the time.

- Homicide rates fell from a level initially comparable to or below that of non-state societies.

How and Why Has Violence Declined?

Pinker (2011): What is the sequence of phases by which violence has declined?

- Pacification: the transition from nomadic life to organized settlement.
- Civilization: the rise of the modern state.
- The humanitarian revolution: the Age of Reason.
- The long peace after 1945.
- The rights revolution: it's my human right.

How and Why Has Violence Declined?

Pinker (2011): What are the causes of the decline in violence?

- The state, which seeks to regulate violence.
- Commerce, which gives communities the chance to cooperate for a positive sum.
- Feminization, since violence is predominantly a male pursuit.
- Cosmopolitanism, which encourages empathy with strangers.
- Reason, which reframes violence as a problem rather than a solution.

But now we need to think some more about the state.

How and Why Has Violence Declined?

Problem: the state.

The state is the regulator of violence.

- And the organizer of violence.
- And the state originated in violence.
- Tilly (1975): In medieval Europe, “War made the state and states made war.”

Problem: Europe.

Europe was the cradle of:

- The nation state.
- Long distance commerce.
- The industrial revolution.
- Global empires.
- Global war.

The Eurasian land mass has few natural frontiers; nearly all land borders are artificial.

Europe, 1000 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1100 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1200 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1300 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1400 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1500 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1600 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1700 AD

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Europe, 1800 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 1900 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Europe, 2000 AD

Source: http://www.euratlas.com.

Trends in Warfare

In Europe nation states have engaged in ceaseless rivalry.

Hoffman (2009): The rivalry of European rulers gave rise to a military technology race or tournament.

- Winner takes all.
- By the sixteenth century, Europe had a comparative advantage in gunpowder-based technologies.
- By 1800 Europeans had conquered one third of the globe and controlled trade routes world wide.

How has this competition among European states been reflected in trends in warfare?

- It's complicated.

Trends in Warfare

This figure (Pinker 2011: 224) shows the proportion of years in each quarter-century in which the great powers were at war from 1500 onwards.

FIGURE 5–12. Percentage of years in which the great powers fought one another, 1500–2000

Source: Graph adapted from Levy & Thompson, 2011. Data are aggregated over 25-year periods.

- There was a downward trend in the proportion of years of great-power conflict, although with much noise and a bump in the twentieth century.

Trends in Warfare

This figure (Pinker 2011: 229) shows the number of conflicts in each year (averaged over quarter-centuries) in Europe from 1400 onwards.

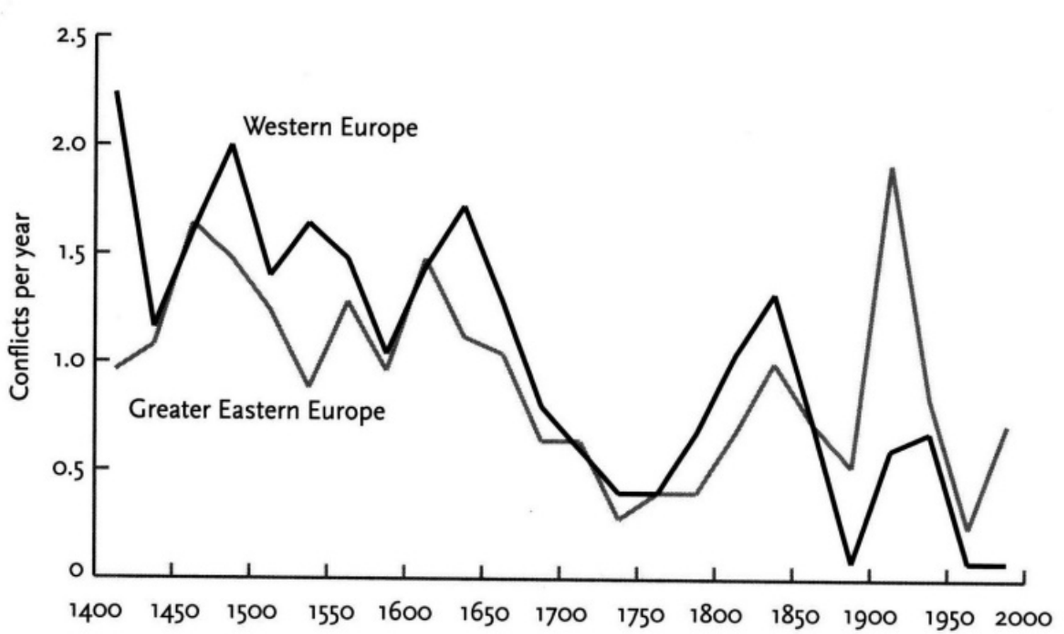


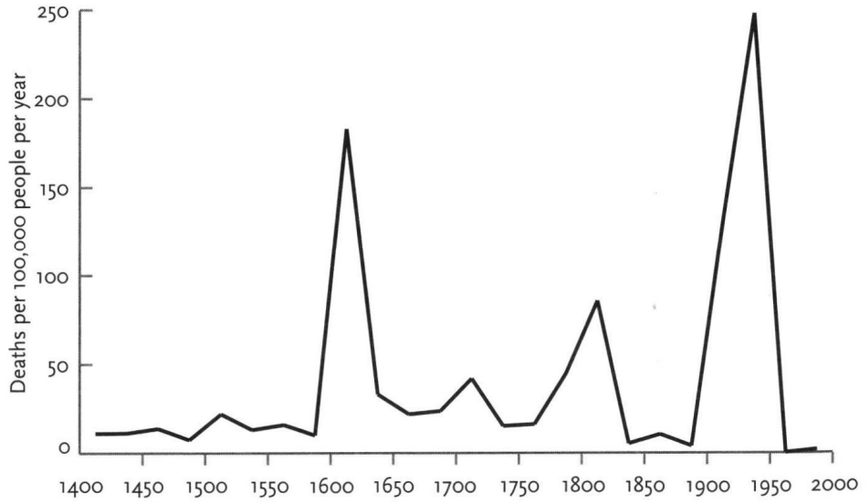
FIGURE 5–17. Conflicts per year in greater Europe, 1400–2000

Sources: Conflict Catalog, Brecke, 1999; Long & Brecke, 2003. The conflicts are aggregated over 25-year periods and include interstate and civil wars, genocides, insurrections, and riots. "Western Europe" includes the territories of the present-day U.K., Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. "Eastern Europe" includes the territories of the present-day Cyprus, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, the republics formerly making up Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey (both Europe and Asia), Russia (Europe), Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and other Caucasus republics.

- There was a downward trend in the frequency of European conflict, again with quite a lot of noise.
- The decline was more pronounced in the west than the east.

Trends in Warfare

This figure (Pinker 2011: 230) shows deaths in conflicts in each year (averaged over quarter-centuries, and normalized by the population) in Europe from 1400 onwards.



- Now the twentieth century looks bad again, at least in Europe.
- We need to think again.

Trends in Warfare

Onorato et al. (2014) identify an era of mass warfare: 1859 to 1970.

Mass armies were first made possible, and later made irrelevant, by developments in transportation technologies.

Railways:

- France vs Italy (1859) and the U.S. Civil War (1861 to 1865) were first conflicts in which railways played a role.
- Railways made it possible to form and coordinate mass armies amounting to ten per cent or more of a country's population in the two world wars.
- Before railways, it was very difficult to concentrate armies of this size in one place and impossible to supply them with food and fodder (later, fuel) when on the move.

Trends in Warfare

Onorato et al. (2014) identify an era of mass warfare: 1859 to 1970.

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Cruise missiles:

- Nuclear weapons, first used in 1945, did not change the prospects of mass warfare at first because they were too crude to be aimed at anything smaller than a city.
- Until the 1970s World War III would begin with mass warfare in central Europe before proceeding quickly to global thermonuclear war.
- Precision guided WMD (cruise missiles and laser guided shells and bombs) were available to the European theatre of the Cold War from 1970.
- Once atomic weapons were made smaller and delivered more accurately, they could threaten troop concentrations.

The prospects for mass warfare among the great powers came to an end (we hope . . . and that's only *mass* warfare, anyway).

Trends in Warfare

Military size and mobilization by century:

	Century	N	Mean	St. dev.	Min.	Max.
Military size, thousands	17	69	95	62	13	362
	18	152	180	102	13	732
	19	80	482	324	11	2,000
	20	142	2,763	2,546	125	12,500
Military mobilization	17	69	1.8%	2.5%	0.2%	19.0%
	18	152	1.6%	1.1%	0.2%	8.2%
	19	80	1.7%	0.9%	0.2%	5.4%
	20	142	3.4%	3.6%	0.2%	16.1%

Source: Onorato et al. (2014: 459). Figures are reported for each in year in which a great power in the sample was at war. Note: “the figure that is out of place is the maximum of 0.19 for *Military Mobilization* in the seventeenth century, it comes from Sweden in 1632 and it is a true outlier for the century (the next closest value is 0.056).”

Trends in Warfare

Military size in great-power wars, 1600 to 2000.

	(3)		(4)	
Railroad track	35003	***	31969	***
Cruise missile	–3,690	***	–3,265	***
Population	0.013	***	0.023	
GDP per capita	0.306	**	0.198	
Literacy quartile	–78.4		–92.4	
Democracy	–631		–111	
Country-fixed effects	Yes		Yes	
Common year trend	Yes		No	
Country-specific year trend	No		Yes	
Number of observations	443		443	

Source: Onorato et al. (2014: 463); the table reports OLS regressions on military size. Significance: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

What We Have Learned

The twentieth century saw an era of mass warfare.

Twentieth-century trends in conflict among the great powers reflected:

- State capacity to limit interpersonal violence.
- And to exercise violence against other states.
- Technological capacity to create and concentrate destructive power.
- And to deliver it against the adversary's concentrations.

At the same time it is easy to overstate the uniqueness of the twentieth century.

Violence among humans has been in steady decline for ten thousand years.

- More people died in wars in the twentieth century than in any previous century.
- This is partly because more people lived in the twentieth century.
- Another factor may be that industrialization made possible a century of mass warfare.

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