

Despite rampant pessimism at the moment, history can show us that life has never been better. The majority of today's humans have more to eat, better health, more stable governance, and much less violence than ever before. Violence needs to be seen in context.

Several authors (The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined and A History of Violence: From the end of the Middle Ages to the Present) insist that violence has decline---even in the face of the horrific 20th Century with two devastating World Wars. The decline can be seen when comparing the percentage of dead with the size of human population.

Warfare in antiquity wiped out entire populations of losers; the victors slaughtered all the males (babies to grandfathers) and carried off the women and girls as slaves.

Among Native Americans (pre-agrarian), the death toll among combatants was 25% to 33%. During the Middle Ages in Europe (and China, India, Persia, and Turkey), warfare was not only deadly, but daily violence was the everyone's lot. Even in times of peace, monarchs presided over daily executions for every sort of offence, the worst deaths (disembowelment or flaying alive) reserved for particular enemies of the state. Life for most was brutish and short.

Even in the Roman Empire, which presided over the largest empire governed by law and order, life was still too cheap. A vast system of slavery was maintained by violence and even Roman entertainments gave the public a taste for violence.

What changed this pattern? The changes started with four revolutions in the Western World: Scientific and Religious (17th century), Industrial (18th and 19th centuries), and Political (19th and 20th). Each of these revolutions transformed older institutions that promoted violence. The Scientific Revolution challenged powerful religions that had grown fanatical and deadly (the Catholic Inquisition, Protestant and Catholic violent conflicts), and diluted their ability to do harm.

The Reformation and Counterreformation broke the bond of religion and state enforcement, a painful, bloody process, but necessary.

The Industrial Revolution (along with the Scientific) provided more food, safer water, and systems of public health that made populations burgeon. Although this revolution also produced the weapons of modern warfare, the growth of human populations diminished the percentage of warfare death rates. The automobile today kills more people in a month than any of our current wars in a year.

The Political Revolution, particularly since the end of World War II, has provided global law and order-and even improvement among some dictatorships. The Political Revolution has roots in the best of what Judeo-Christianity had to offer, values (equal value of human souls under God and the force of conscience) that were mainstreamed even while these religions lost their life and death power.

One of the most sweeping changes in violence has been the emancipation of women in the Western world. Death in childbearing has declined thanks to the Scientific Revolution. The decline of orthodox religions has freed women from involuntary pregnancy and violence from their men. Female participation has improved most other western institutions.

Two outliers, the Muslim World and Sub-Saharan Africa, are exceptions to the decline of violence. Islam has not yet had a reformation and has entered into an era of internal religious conflict akin to the violent Protestant/Catholic wars of the 16th and 17th centuries. Watch the \223Arab Spring\224 in Egypt for backsliding into ethnic conflict (religious fanaticism), a retreat from the emancipation of women, and return to religiosity. The four Western revolutions have too little influence there.

Sub-Saharan Africa is undergoing a phase of extreme warlordism, a combination of tribalism abetted by modern weapons of state control.

Both of these outliers are deadly for women. The combination of religiosity and tribal misogyny (both share a scorn for women) has been instrumental in the lack of women's health, unending pregnancies, and violence from their menfolk. The poorer and more backward the country, the greater the violence toward women. Think of Chad, the

worst of the worst.

Bless your lucky stars that you live where you do. Life has never been better.

677 words

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