

Modern civilization doesn't diminish violence

October 26 2017, by Kathleen Haughney

Modern civilization may not have dulled mankind's bloodlust, but living in a large, organized society may increase the likelihood of surviving a war, a Florida State University anthropology professor said.

FSU Distinguished Research Professor of Anthropology Dean Falk and Charles Hildebolt, a professor from the Washington University Medical School in St. Louis, argue in a new edition of the journal *Current Anthropology* that while larger, modern-day societies may have a larger number of soldiers or combatants who die, they represent a smaller percent of the total population.

In addition, people who live in modern-day nations are not less violent than their ancestors or people who currently live in small-scale hunting, gathering and horticultural societies, Falk said.

"Rather than being more violent, people who live in small-scale societies are more vulnerable to a significant portion of their community being killed in warfare than those living in states because, as the old saying goes, 'there is safety in numbers,'" Falk said. "We recognize, of course, that people living in all types of societies have the potential not only for violence—but also for peace."

Falk and Hildebolt found that war deaths for both small-scale and more modern state societies escalate upward with increasing population sizes. Part of that, they believe, is because of the innovations in weapons and military strategies associated with modern life.

Instead of stone axes, there are now fighter planes and more sophisticated weaponry.

Falk said the findings challenge the idea that as nations and modern societies develop, there is a reduction in violence and war deaths.

In this study, Falk and Hildebolt analyzed data on population sizes and death from intergroup conflicts in 11 chimpanzee communities, 24 human nonstates, 19 countries that fought in World War I and 22 countries that fought in World War II.

They included chimpanzees, Falk said, because they attack and kill individuals in other groups. They found that chimpanzees on a whole were less violent than humans, which researchers believe suggests that humans developed more severe forms of warfare compared to chimps.

However, like humans, their annual average percentage of deaths declined as the population increased.

More information: Dean Falk et al. Annual War Deaths in Small-Scale versus State Societies Scale with Population Size Rather than Violence, *Current Anthropology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1086/694568](https://doi.org/10.1086/694568)

Provided by Florida State University

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