

Our world – an increasingly peaceful place

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Håvard Hegre was recently appointed professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University. Credit: Mikael Wallerstedt

The number of armed conflicts in the world will continue to decrease. At least according to Håvard Hegre, new professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University, Sweden. His prognosis for the coming 40 years shows several positive trends that will strengthen peace.

In November, Håvard Hegre was appointed new Dag Hammarskjöld Professor at Uppsala University, taking over the professorship from Peter Wallensteen. He comes directly from Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the University of Oslo, where he has received a lot of attention for his prognosis for peace and conflicts in the world, which was calculated together with Uppsala University.

The prognosis paints a positive picture: In the year 2050, the proportion of countries at war will have decreased to 7 per cent and only one per cent – two countries – will have conflicts causing 1,000 or more deaths per year.

This optimistic outlook raised quite a bit of attention, both locally and internationally, says Håvard Hegre.

"Of course it is controversial to make a prognosis such as this, and naturally there are many factors that may change, but our model builds on extensive research and [conflict](#) data from between 1946 and 2012 from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project."

One of the most important developments is that global poverty is decreasing. This also means fewer conflicts, since countries with high poverty, low education and young populations are at greater risk of becoming involved in conflicts.

More than half of the world's conflicts during 2012 were in the poorest quarter of all countries.

"There are several reasons for that. Poverty is an incentive for conflict and can lead to uprisings. It is also easy to recruit soldiers in countries with many poor, and the elite loses less from the economic effects of the conflict. That is why decreased poverty is one of the most important factors in our model."

Another factor is the so-called 'conflict trap'. The longer there has been peace in a country, the lower the risk of war.

"Conflicts feed conflicts and peace nurtures peace. Five years after a conflict the risk of a new conflict is five times greater than before the conflict. Every year of peace makes a difference", says Håvard Hegre.

Here too, a positive development can be seen. In 2012 the world's countries had seen on average 42 years of peace, which can be compared to an average of 27 years in 1960.

"Since we have had a trend of decreasing conflicts for the last 20 years, we can be optimistic about the coming 40 years."

Another important factor is that the attitudes towards violence and conflicts has changed, according to Håvard Hegre.

"The war between the US and Vietnam would not have been possible today. That was only 40 years ago, and since then there has been a dramatic change in our attitude towards use of violence."

However, another type of conflict is on the rise, which has not been possible to predict using the model that the researchers have developed: In [countries](#) such as Syria and Libya, demands for democratisation have caused [violent conflicts](#).

"We must add democratisation to our model to give a better prognosis. This means we need to be able to predict changes to political systems over the coming years, which increases complexity."

In the long run, democratisation is a process which strengthens [peace](#). It tends to bring increased levels of education, reduced poverty and higher incomes. So in spite of these new conflicts, the prognosis of fewer wars around the world remains.

"The media are conflict oriented and their selection is not representative. There is great focus on the conflict in Syria, but not much is being written about Colombia where the conflict is almost over", says Håvard Hegre.

Provided by Uppsala University

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