

What is war good for? Reproductive success and evolution, according to new research

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What motivates war? Ideology and theology and, in cultures of honor, answering an affront. Years ago, someone in clan A accused someone in clan B of stealing someone's favorite camel, and it's been retributive fighting ever since. In most wars, of course, material rewards—land and plundered goods—also have been a major motivation.

Evolutionary biologists take a longer view. They pose the basic Darwinian question: Does success in warfare enhance reproductive success, increasing the number of copies of genes that a man passes to future generations? Spectacular examples of this certainly exist. Ibn Saud, who unified Saudi Arabia in 1932 after a series of conquests, has thousands of descendants; tens of millions of humans appear to carry the genes of Genghis Khan.

But is there more systematic evidence that high rates of participation in warfare enhance reproductive success? With the exception of a controversial 1988 study of an Amazonian tribe, the answer is no. That is why [research conducted by Harvard scientists Luke Glowacki and Richard Wrangham](#), writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, is so interesting.

The authors studied the Nyangatom, nomadic pastoralists living on the Ethiopian/South Sudanese/Kenyan border. Like many traditional pastoralists, the Nyangatom spend a lot of time raiding other groups' cattle (or, depending on whose side you're taking, reclaiming their own stolen cattle).

Read full, original post: [Do the Genes of Warriors Win the Evolution Battle?](#)