

Is violence built into our genes and human nature?

Violence is clearly not a modern phenomenon, but is it an inherent part of being human? Have we evolved to be aggressive?

It turns out the answer isn't simple. A 2014 study published in the journal [Nature](#) noted that lethal violence was common in the communities of one of our closest living primate relatives: [chimpanzees](#).

That suggests that violence may have been part of the human repertoire at least as far back as our last shared ancestor with chimps, which would have lived about 8 million years ago.

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So clearly, violence has been prevalent for as long as humans have been around, experts told Live Science.

"Violence is a driver of much of human history," [David C. Geary](#), a cognitive scientist and evolutionary psychologist at the University of Missouri in Columbia, told Live Science in an email. "All of humanity's early empires were built through intimidation and violence."

"There's also evidence of aggression before recorded history: bones with evidence of violent death, like embedded arrow points or skulls staved in," [Pat Barclay](#), an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Guelph in Ontario told Live Science in an email. That suggests violence predated complex societies and the rise of civilization.

But on the flip side, rates of violence vary (and have historically varied) wildly across [cultures](#) and communities, Barclay said. That suggests violence can be dialed up or down dramatically in our species.

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