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Battle-Related Deaths

The concept of a battle is mostly connected with gladiators and Roman colosseums in the public conscience. People generally would not consider modern war a “battle”, in the sense of the meaning it has come to take on. For this reason, when I found a field for “Battle-related deaths” from 1989 – 2015 while researching topics in the World Bank’s Archives, my curiosity was immediately piqued. I looked into it and, to sum it up briefly, a battle related death is defined as any death, either civilian or military, that occurs as a result of an officially declared battle or war between two belligerent parties. This sounds kind of weird, and it is because if you look at the United States in the year 2001, only 233 deaths are reported, which is an obvious discrepancy considering the September 11th attacks killed more than that. This is because terrorist attacks like 9/11 are not considered parts of a declared war between two belligerent parties; the US may be at odds with terrorist groups in the middle east, but since no official war was declared between two groups, those deaths are not factored into this dataset. The strict requirements for these deaths to appear in the dataset make it even more shocking how many deaths appear in certain parts of the world.

War affects the entire world; entire economies have been built and sustained on continued warfare against other entities, for a considerable portion of human history. From empires conquering land by force, to colonization sweeping the world, to the military-industrial complex around the World Wars in the United States, the art of attacking and killing other armies has been appealing and lucrative to all sorts of people. Battle can often be glorified; some video games turn war into a sport, with players using various guns to kill as many people as they can. The U.S. Army has made its own first person shooter to raise awareness and support for the it. Overall, it is safe to say the art of warfare is very socially relevant.

My visualization shows the entire world, with countries who had no battle-related deaths on record in the timeframe given by my dataset displayed in a soft green, and countries with death marked on a scale from white (0 deaths) to black (20,000 deaths) to red (70,000 deaths). The scale seems to work very well, and only one or two places ever reaches the red zone. Since my preliminary display I added a color key in the bottom right, explaining what the colors represent, and added the World Bank’s description of a Battle-related death. I believe these additions significantly add to the overall experience.

I’m afraid I ran into a weird hiccup these past two days; after moving out of my room and arriving home, I found I was unable to access my personal Stevens folder, as I was no longer on the network. In addition, while everything was working a few days ago, I went back to look today and my map is giving me errors on load, which is strange considering my Firefox had a cached version of the page that worked perfectly and not a single thing has changed since the last time it worked. For some reason both Chrome and Firefox are upset about the function iso\_abbr\_to\_code, which I used successfully earlier, no longer works. I apologize for the inconvenience but this project is already late and I don’t have access to my files as I foolishly left the versions on the site I cannot easily pull from, and that I can no longer upload to. If you would like me to further debug this annoying issue, please feel free to let me know and I will continue to work on it.

Overall, working on this visualization was made very easy from my past experience in HST325. The templates we were provided worked very well, and with a bit of elbow grease, it was fairly straightforward to mold my data into data that could be expressed as a choropleth over time. This visualization lets you really understand where wars are concentrated at specific points in time, and gives a greater understanding to the turmoil affecting specific parts of the world. It is truly a testament to modern technology that a single database can be used to power an easy to understand visual map that can turn a sequence of words and numbers into easily understood information. It is for this reason, above all else, that the whole field of Data Visualization is socially relevant; if it can be used to increase people’s understanding of the world around them, it can help make entire new areas of concentration socially relevant, that may not otherwise have been as accessible.