

# First thing we do is kill all the jerks

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Raymond Chen

There a fascinating article in today's *New York Times* on a troop of baboons which went pacifist:

... researchers describe the drastic temperamental and tonal shift that occurred in a troop of 62 baboons when its most belligerent members vanished from the scene. The victims were all dominant adult males that had been strong and snarly enough to fight with a neighboring baboon troop over the spoils at a tourist lodge garbage dump, and were exposed there to meat tainted with bovine tuberculosis, which soon killed them. Left behind... were the 50 percent of males that had been too subordinate to try dump brawling, as well as all the females and their young. With that change in demographics came a cultural swing toward pacifism, a relaxing of the usually parlous baboon hierarchy, and a willingness to use affection and mutual grooming rather than threats, swipes and bites to foster a patriotic spirit.

It has been twenty years since this cataclysmic event and the amicable atmosphere persists even though none of the original male survivors is still around.

“We don't yet understand the mechanism of transmittal... but the jerky new guys are obviously learning, ‘We don't do things like that around here.’”

Of course, baboons will be baboons.

The new-fashioned Forest Troop is no United Nations, or even the average frat house. Its citizens remain highly aggressive and argumentative, and the males still obsess over hierarchy. “We're talking about baboons here,” said Dr. Sapolsky.

Sounds a lot like the real United Nations to me.

[Raymond Chen](#)

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