



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on June 21, 2024

Fear Erupts Over America

Sometimes a gal's gotta rant (again), so here goes.

Shootings are devastating. Obviously! But I also wonder about the value of LUMPING shootings together and reporting them as such. My Yahoo newsfeed on Monday screamed, "GUN VIOLENCE ERUPTS OVER FATHER'S DAY WEEKEND."

Then, in a country of 333 million, it told of three shootings in three different states that left two dead. Tragic! But also ... disorienting.

Gun violence is bad. Who would say otherwise? But "erupting"? That verb makes you think if you stick your head out the window, it's going to get it blown off.

As shaky as that might make anyone, it hits parents in the solar plexus. It's one reason so many parents don't let their kids do anything unsupervised anymore: Violence is erupting! Even a holiday weekend isn't sacred! (The "next up" article Yahoo linked to was "11 People Killed on Mother's Day Weekend" — natch.)

So let's take a look at some — I realize this is strange — actual crime statistics. Kooky as a kombucha cocktail party, I know. But indulge me. Because this article in The New York Times says that in 2023, "The number of murders in U.S. cities fell by more than 12 percent." That's — hmm, what else does the article say? — "the biggest national decline on record."

Hey — what about that huge crime surge during COVID-19? "The spike that started in 2020 now looks more like a blip, and the murder rate is lower than it was during the 1970s, '80s and '90s."

So: TODAY'S MURDER RATE IS LOWER THAN IT WAS WHEN ALMOST ALL OF TODAY'S PARENTS WERE KIDS ... WHO WERE ALLOWED TO GO OUTSIDE.

And yet, a University of Michigan/Mott Children's Hospital study in October found that the majority of parents WANT to give their kids more independence but are too scared to even let their 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds walk to a friend's house. Half will not let them go to another aisle at the store.

Those are rational decisions in some neighborhoods — but not most. But it sure feels rational when you wake up to a headline saying you live in a volcano of violence.

The media's relentless, contextless focus on the worst of the worst is a pox on our sanity. It may seem like some kind of public duty — keeping folks informed. But actually, it is contributing NOT to a more peaceful, healthy society but to a more distrustful and fearful one. A society that wastes its time — and its children's youth and mental health — hovering over them, dithering and worrying when it should be stepping back and letting the kids do something like, maybe, enjoy the summer! Play outside! Go an aisle over and bring me back a can of tomato paste!



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I worked at a tabloid for 14 years. I know that bad news leads. “Mostly Peaceful Weekend!” will never sell. Never get clicks. But if the Yahoo headline was true — two gun deaths — it WAS a mostly peaceful Father’s Day weekend. Not for everyone! We all wish it was! But for 99.999% of Americans, it was just grilling and chilling.

If we wait till there is zero crime anywhere in all 50 states before we let our kids walk to a friends’ house (or the pasta aisle), the terrorists — er, click optimizers — will have won.

Don’t let them.

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