



Study: Gen Zers Want Safety Above All Else. Will They Trade Liberty for It?

Ah, those carefree days of youth, when kids feel so bulletproof that they may seem oblivious to their own mortality. Well, that's the way it was, anyway. If a new study is to be believed, however, this has changed, with Gen Z young people being more mother hen than rowdy rooster.

In fact, a new "Teen Snapshot" study reveals that to these youngsters, safety is "Priority #1."

While this finding may please Nervous Nellie moms coast to coast, it itself may be cause for worry. A famous saying from Benjamin Franklin illustrates why. "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety," it goes, "deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

Franklin thus admonished because he understood that man's instinct is, especially when feeling imperiled, to sacrifice liberty for security. So will Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) zap our freedoms when some seductive demagogue promises a bubble-wrap utopia?

Tale of the Tape

The aforementioned study was conducted by Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, of the University of California, Los Angeles, and her colleagues. A UCLA press released [sums up](#) their findings:

- "To be safe" was the top goal for Generation Z in a survey of 1,644 10- to 24-year-olds across the U.S. Other top goals were "to be kind," "to have a lot of fun," "self-acceptance" and "to be in good shape."
- Safety as a top goal for Gen Z may be a result of compounding crises, including reports of school shootings and increased threats, financial uncertainty and lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Findings follow other recent studies that indicate Generation Z is making mental and physical health a priority.

Along with the kindness imperative, there is other good — and perhaps surprising — news from the study as well. For example, Dr. Uhls [writes](#), earlier focus-group research with Los Angeles tweens found that most "wanted to be famous." Yet this priority was second to last (13th) among the recent cross-section-of-America group.

Related to this, "to be popular" was only 12th on the list of goals. And while younger generations have a reputation for being money oriented, "to be rich" was down at number nine.

On the other hand, "to be like my family and stick to tradition" languished in the 11th spot. This is



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lamentable — especially since most families today aren't even all that traditional.

The study also found, not surprisingly, a sexual divide. While safety was the number one priority overall, boys ranked it third, behind having fun and kindness. Girls ranked it first, in front of kindness, self-acceptance, and having fun.

Generational 180?

Noting that these findings appear a stark departure from the carefree-youth stereotype, Uhls [wrote](#) today at The Conversation:

Whereas previous generations may have taken safety for granted, today's youth are growing up in an era of compounded crises — school shootings, a worsening climate crisis, financial uncertainty and the lingering trauma of a global pandemic. Even though our research did not pinpoint the specific causes of adolescent fears, the constant exposure to crises, amplified by social media, likely plays a significant role in fostering a pervasive sense of worry.

Despite data showing that many aspects of life are safer now than in previous generations, young people just don't feel it. Their perception of danger is further shaped by events like the recent fires that devastated Los Angeles....

The social-media and "constant exposure to crises" (propaganda) points are good ones. I remember when I was a child in grade school, back in the mid 1970s, hearing warnings about a coming ice age (along with the "killer bees" story). This was scary, but it came and went. I can only imagine, though, how chronically frightened we might've become had the warnings been unrelenting and social-media reinforced. That is the case, too, with today's "climate change" narrative. Yet there's more to it.

Lack of Perspective

An observation made by Uhls, who's also founder and CEO of UCLA's Center for Scholars & Storytellers, is instructive here. Despite living in among the safest times in man's history, kids "just don't *feel* it," she observed. They have a "perception of danger." Of course, perception and reality can be very different things. So question:

Could this "perception" have anything to do with how poorly history is taught today? After all, if your historical perspective begins with the time you became aware of the world, then guess what?

Whatever tragedies have occurred in your time are "the worst things that have ever happened."

For example, Covid might've seemed a most frightful pandemic — until you realize the Black Death killed off one-quarter to one-half of medieval Europe. Many people thought it was the end of the world.

School shootings may make life seem unusually perilous. (In reality, the *average* youth is more likely to die in an auto accident or by drowning.) Things *were* different, too, for virtually all of history. People often lived with the reality that barbarians could raid their town and kill their family — at any time. They dealt with the knowledge that if the rains didn't come and the crops didn't grow, they and theirs could starve to death.

Expensive healthcare may seem a problem, too. That is, until realizing that for almost all of history no one had what we'd even call "health care." I once read that the average lifespan in ancient Greece —



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perhaps its time's most advanced civilization — was 35.

And “financial uncertainty” may seem cosmically unfair. “I should be able to afford my own house!” (at age 26). Only, most people had no “finances,” to speak of, for most of history; grinding poverty was the norm.

The Deity Deficit

In truth, safety is an illusion. We risk our lives just by living. Those poor souls who perished in yesterday's [air crash](#) at the Reagan National Airport were just like you and me. They were going about their business, engaging in what were meant to be uneventful activities. And next time it could be you or me. So how do you banish the fear?

Faith.

One thing missing, sadly, among the Gen Zers' 14 priorities was “doing God's will.” Oh, I know, that wouldn't have been any different with older generations, either. Ours is a secular age. Yet faith matters because when believing this life is all there is, we can become inordinately afraid of losing it. Faith [brings the ultimate perspective](#):

This life is a mere pilgrimage, and a preparation — for something infinitely better.

It would be interesting to do a study like Uhls' with truly devout religious believers. We just might find that they're less fearful but also prioritize safety — the safety of their souls.



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