

Flying Is Much Safer Than You Think

July 05, 2024

With all the recent headlines about windows and tires popping off of planes, you might think flying is becoming more risky. But is this actually true, or are we just overreacting? Let's dig a little deeper.

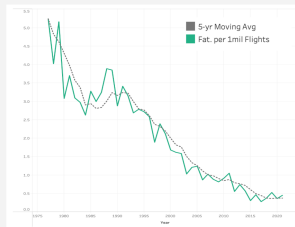
42,514

In 2022, 42,514 people in the US were killed in vehicular accidents[1]. That's enough people to fill a typical college stadium. Considering the US population was roughly 333 million at the time, that means that one in every 7400 people were killed in a traffic accident.

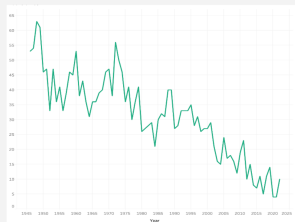
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Meanwhile, it has been over 15 years since the last fatal crash of a commercial airliner in the US[2]. This means that despite roughly 45,000 flights taking off every day of the year, there has not been a fatal crash since the Samsung Galaxy was first put on the market.

Rate of Airline Fatalities Per Million Flights Over Time

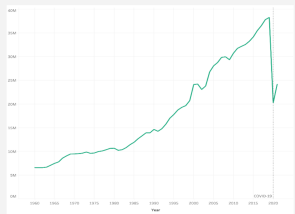


Number of Fatal Airline Accidents Over Time



And this isn't just unique to the United States. Since the 1990s, both the total number and rate of global airline fatalities has been steadily declining[3]. Today, there is now only 1 fatality expected for every 2 million flights across the globe. You would have better odds flipping a coin 20 times and landing heads every time than being on board a plane crash.

Number of Global Airline Departures Over Time



Those who are skeptical might point out that this increase in safety could simply be due to fewer flights departing. In fact, this could not be further from the truth. Up until the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of airline departures had been steadily increasing up to a peak of over 38 million flights per year[4]. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the widespread dissemination of vaccines and the lifting of global lockdowns has led to more people flying once again, with no signs of slowing down.

Let's compare the numbers on US traffic fatalities and airline fatalities one more time:

Traffic Fatalities in 2022

Miles Traveled (mil.)	3,196,191
Fatalities	42,514
Fatalities / 100,00 ppl	12.80
Deaths / 100mil mi.	1.33

Airline Fatalities in 2022

Miles Traveled (mil.)	5,000+
Fatalities	0
Fatalities / 100,00 ppl	0
Deaths / 100mil mi.	0

The data is clear.

Flying is much safer than you think.

Sources:

- [1] <https://www.nhtsa.gov/data>
- [2] <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/nyregion/13crash.html>
- [3] <https://aas.flightsafety.org/>
- [4] <http://web.mit.edu/airlinedata/www/Traffic&Capacity.html>

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