



Buckle Up Journalists!

(Part Three)

2024 may be a 'wild ride'

By

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We are 'leaping' as it were into a new year of big news stories. I'm sharing thoughts on some of them each Tuesday during January. You can read previous news topics [here](#) and [here](#). Let's move next to **Reparations, Gun Laws, Crime, and Criminal Justice.**

Reparations

Several governors and state legislators are calling for major reparations for descendants of slaves (e.g. New York, California, Tennessee). Other states are opposed to reparations for a variety of reasons. Many question why now and how the states will come up with enough money to pay millions of dollars for reparations to some of its citizens.

A majority of Californians do not support reparations, according to a September poll. Almost 60% of California voters opposed cash payments, while 29% of voters supported the idea, according to a UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll that was cosponsored by the Los Angeles Times.

Here's what one Tennessee state representative is planning to do about reparations in 2024 —

"Tennessee is the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, yet my colleagues told me it was 'too controversial' to bring up legislation about reparations," Jones wrote on X on Friday.

"Nonetheless, looking forward to filing a reparations bill in 2024. It is long overdue," he added. [Tag24](#)

Some members of Congress have said that \$14-trillion will 'eliminate the racial wealth gap' in the United States. ([ABC News](#)) That raises many questions about who will pay for the reparations, who will qualify to receive them, how payments will be made, etc.

What's happening in your community and state? Talk with your audience. What do they think about state-by-state reparations? What do they think about national reparations? Talk with all ethnic groups. Interview the decision makers in these cases. Where do candidates stand on the issue this election season? The issue of reparations will most likely be on some ballots, so this is a good time to cover the story.

"A plurality of Americans," Tatishe Nteta says, "don't believe the descendants of slaves deserve reparations."

The political science professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, plans more research to get at exactly why people think that. The other most common reasons opponents cite is that it's "impossible to place a monetary value on the impact of slavery" and "African Americans are treated equally in society today."

Nteta, and also the Pew Research Center, find about three-quarters or more of white adults oppose reparations, and so do a majority of Latinos and Asian Americans. A large majority of Black Americans support them. There's also more support among younger people and a sharp political divide, with overwhelming opposition from Republicans and conservatives. [NPR](#)

Gun Laws

Many people are calling for stricter gun laws in states across the country, while others say the proposed restrictions are unconstitutional. Many new gun laws in various states went into effect on January 1st, including more strict 'carry' laws, weapon-type restrictions, new registration and taxation laws (including ammunition), etc.

Some of the new gun restrictions are being challenged in court. Here are a couple of examples —

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has granted Maryland's petition for the full court to consider the state's handgun licensing law that was struck down in November by a three-judge panel, Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown said Thursday. CBS News

Advocates for gun rights urged the New Mexico Supreme Court on Monday to block emergency orders by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham restricting people from carrying guns at public parks and playgrounds in the

state's largest metro area and address gun violence as a public health crisis. The Associated Press

What's going on in your community and state? How will new gun restrictions impact your audience? How will new laws affect hunters? What do law enforcement agencies think about the new laws? What does your audience think about the court challenges to the new laws? Be sure to get all sides of the stories you cover and tell your stories through real people and not just 'officials.'

Crime

Is crime up or down in the United States? To be more specific, what types of crimes are up and what types of crime are down?

After three years of distressingly high levels, homicides in the US declined significantly across the board in 2023 – even as the public’s concerns about crime remained at its highest in over two decades.

In particular, the five biggest cities in the US – New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Phoenix – each saw homicides fall by over 10%, according to the latest data from those police departments.

Further, national data from the FBI covering January to September 2023 showed an 8.2% drop in all violent crime, including a 15.6% drop in murders, compared to the same period in 2022. These declines were seen in cities over 1 million people and those under 10,000, and across all four regional quadrants of the US. The

full year of data won't be released until this fall, but the trend is clear.

Taken together, the broad decline in crimes in 2023 suggests societal disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 police murder of George Floyd have faded, policing experts say. [CNN](#)

While some violent crimes are on the decrease, what about non-violent crimes? Many communities are reporting an increase in [car theft](#) and retail threat —

Finance executives say they are fighting a growing wave of theft, cutting into profits that were already under pressure. But theft is just one contributor to shrink, the industry term for the difference between inventory on the books and what's physically on hand. Lost or damaged goods and inaccurate records also play a part. The picture of retail shrink, which retailers say has been accelerating, may also have been distorted by effects of the pandemic and inflation, some analysts say. [The Wall Street Journal](#)

Interestingly enough, city leaders in our nation's capital are looking at ways to stem the tide of growing crime. Scores of restaurants have closed in Washington D.C. because of crime —

According to the Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Association, 52 restaurants in D.C. have shuttered in 2023. [Fox News](#)

In addition to car theft being up 84%, other crime in D.C. increased almost 40%. That has led city leaders to look at how to deal with the growing crime problem in the nation's capital —

Public safety legislation unveiled Wednesday by local lawmakers in the nation's capital is aimed at bringing down spiraling violent crimes rates that have stoked public anxiety and prompted congressional scrutiny.

Homicides jumped by 35 percent in 2023 in Washington while car thefts and carjackings both essentially doubled. The carjacking victims in D.C. last year included a U.S. Congressman and a diplomat from the United Arab Emirates. Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Lyndsey Appiah openly admitted before a congressional hearing last year that the District is in the midst of a crime crisis.

The proposed bill loosens restrictions for police officers on physically handling suspects and when they are authorized to engage in vehicular pursuits. It would also allow police officer to review their own body camera footage prior to making their report in cases not involving serious use of force. [PBS News Hour](#)

Is crime up or down in your coverage area? Are the types of crimes changing? More felonies? Less felonies? Murder rates up or down? Shootings up or down? How about car thefts and carjackings? What about assaults? Identity theft? Rape? Child trafficking? Scams against the elderly?

Person-to-person crimes, along with cyber crimes — what's happening in your community? What does your audience think about the enforcement of current laws and recommendations for new laws? What do your local enforcement agencies and government leaders think about crime trends in your coverage area?

Look for ways to tell crime stories through the lives of real people. Crimes are not just statistics. Behind every crime statistic are real people suffering and struggling as they seek justice. Don't just cover family and attorney news conferences. Go to where people live. If they are open to telling their story from inside their homes and businesses, do that. Crime is personal, so tell it as 'personally' as you can.

Criminal Justice

What does your audience think about the way local district attorneys and judges are handling crime in your community? What charges are district attorneys making, and what charges are they dropping? How are judges ruling on crimes brought before them in court? Most were tough on convicted criminals when I covered courts years ago. Is that still the case? If not, why not? Talk with judges and district attorneys to get their take on what's happening.

Compare local crime numbers with state and national numbers. Are things better or worse where you live? If worse, what do prosecutors and judges plan to do about it? Are bail laws tough enough? Are sentences effective? Ask tough questions of these powerful people. Remember, they are elected or appointed for the purpose of 'serving' the public. Is the public being served? Is the public protected? Part of your job as a journalist is to hold powerful people accountable for how they carry out their responsibilities for the good of the community.



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