



Taking candy from a baby

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When I was a kid they warned us not to accept sweets from a strange man. I had my doubts. It just didn't add up. Why would someone be prepared to share his Minties with me when he didn't even know me?

Using a bowl of Skittles to illustrate the risks allegedly posed by Syrian refugees is not mathematically sound.

You grow up and realize some strange men are too appalling for words.

This week a strange man with an orange face and a hamster for hair was offering people sweets and asking them to make him President.

There was a bowl of candy. Beautiful candy, the best candy you'll ever taste. Crooked Hillary would make you eat Kale and drink Kombucha.

Go on, help yourself to a handful of Skittles. Except three of them might be poisoned.

This is how Donald Trump makes the argument that you can't risk taking in Syrian refugees.

There might be one, or two or three homicidal fanatical terrorists hiding among all those people running for their lives.

Let's leave aside the fact that this reasoning was first used by actual Nazis.

Let's leave aside the irony that the photo was taken by a refugee and used by the Trump campaign without his permission.

Let's leave aside just how long and rigorous a process it is to wind your way through the US refugee and immigration system.

Let's just explore the maths of it.

The Cato Institute calculates the odds of an American being killed by a Syrian refugee in a terror attack as 1 in 3.64 billion. A bowl of candies won't work. You'll need a photo of a grain silo full of candies to get the ratio right. Now: ask people to take a handful again, Donald. Do you feel lucky, punk?

What Trump is asserting is that the slightest risk is too great a risk. Stay inside, then, draw the curtains and hope for the best, because as soon as you step out your front door, there's poisoned candy everywhere you look.

Your odds of dying in a car crash in the US are about 1 in 10,000. In candy terms, that means poison by the handful. To put it another way, your car is 300,000 times more dangerous than a Syrian refugee.

Statistically, you're at greater risk of being bitten by a snake. A dog could kill you. A cheeseburger could do it.

Statistically, you're at vastly greater risk of being shot by a family member. You might be worried about that boy with ash on his face, sitting in an ambulance in Aleppo but you should probably worry more about about your toddler who has just picked up your pistol.

Statistically you have about a 40 per cent chance of going bankrupt if you do business with Donald Trump and don't ask for your money upfront but what's that got to do with being killed?

Well, nothing actually, but the guy's mind wanders like that all the time, so here we are out on a tangent.

The frustration for anyone like me who fondly imagines that you can settle an argument with reasoning and facts is that in so much of politics, facts and reasoning are the least of it.

A poll this week found 49 per cent of Australians support a ban on Muslim immigration. They have terrorism fears. They believe Muslim migrants don't integrate into society, that they don't share Australian values.

You can lay out statistics and facts and lessons of history to demonstrate why they're mistaken and try to persuade them they've been whipped into a frenzy by people who either don't know better, or ought to, but you'll get way more attention if you talk the way Pauline Hanson does.

They told us when I was a kid we were living in an age of exciting change. When it meant space rockets, people liked it. Economic upheaval, they like less. Laws against discrimination, they like less. You can ask them not to use the N word, but don't kid yourself they're listening. Immigration makes them livid.

Hate festers, and a certain kind of politician clears his throat.

Statistically, that kind of politician appears to have a support rate that tops out at about 40 per cent, just enough to keep him out of power. I want very much to believe this fact, but boy he makes me worry.