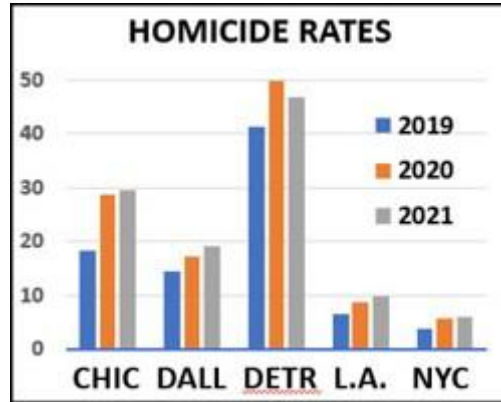


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WHAT'S UP? VIOLENCE.

WHERE? *WHERE ELSE?*

As usual, poor neighborhoods shoulder most of the burden



For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. [“I just want justice for my child, that’s all.”](#) That soul-stirring sentiment, expressed by a disconsolate Chicago-area father after the shooting death of his fourteen-year old son on November 12th., likely echoed the reaction of the parents of another 14-year old boy, [slain nearby just a few hours later](#). Indeed, the murderous reputation of Englewood, the neighborhood where the second killing took place, recently led us to use it in an essay entitled [“The Usual Victims”](#).

Yet as one scours for insights into the murderous violence that’s beset our troubled nation since the murder of [George Floyd](#) and the beginning of the pandemic, neighborhoods are ignored. Academically and in the media, the focus is on cities. Of course, *place* matters. (We even have a post [of that name!](#) But as it emphasizes, to really understand *why* the violence, and how best to respond, one must ultimately go beyond political aggregates such as cities and drill down to neighborhoods. That’s the principle that underpins our [“Neighborhoods”](#) special topic. But before we apply that approach,

HOMICIDE RATES							
	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
Chic	18.4	492	18.2	771	28.6	794	29.5
Dall	17.5	198	14.5	236	17.3	262	19.2
Detr	30.6	275	41.4	328	49.7	309	46.8
L.A.	16.7	258	6.4	351	8.8	395	9.9
NYC	16.0	319	3.8	468	5.6	485	5.8

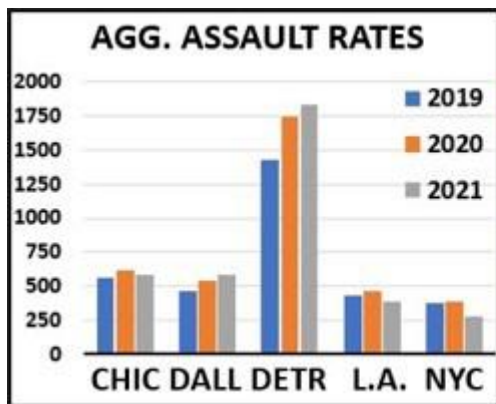
let’s turn to five major cities – Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles and New York City – to assess whether a “crime wave” really exists.

These are the numbers that go along with our opening homicide

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graph. (Sources listed below. Rates per 100,000 pop. were computed using city population figures in FBI and Census portals.)

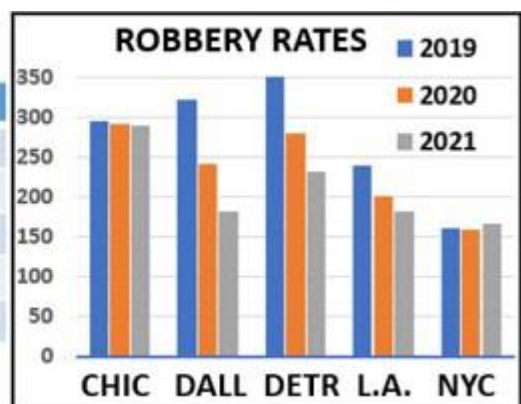
Clearly, each city endured substantial increases in murder. Detroit's numbers are truly deplorable, Chicago's a bit less so. Still, note that 57 percent increase in murders for 2020. Los Angeles and New York City, which started off and ended in a far better place, also experienced substantial increases that year (36 percent and 46.7 percent respectively.) And except for Detroit, which reported fewer homicides in 2021, murder rates kept getting worse.



	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
Chic	18.4	15296	565.0	16597	616.2	15708	583.2
Dall	17.5	6369	467.2	7417	544.2	7959	583.9
Detr	30.6	9467	1426.8	11518	1746.2	12125	1838.2
L.A.	16.7	17216	428.7	18535	463.3	15772	386.2
NYC	16.0	31336	374.0	32056	386.2	22823	275.0

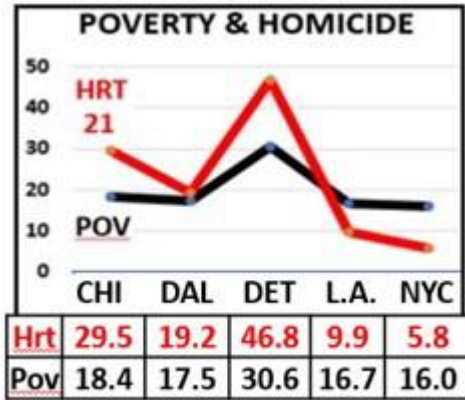
While America is decidedly on the wrong track homicide-wise, aggravated assault presents a more complex picture. Each city experienced a substantial increase in 2020; Detroit's already sky-high figures surged 21.7 percent. And while the Motor City and Dallas endured another jump in 2021, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City experienced declines. In the latter two, the numbers actually fell below 2019 levels.

	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
Chic	18.4	7983	295	7869	292.1	7796	289.4
Dall	17.5	4400	323	3292	241.5	2481	182
Detr	30.6	2346	354	1848	280.2	1529	231.8
L.A.	16.7	9652	240	8013	200.3	7314	182.8
NYC	16.0	13396	160	13182	158.8	13835	166.7



What about robbery? Chicago didn't experience a significant change in rates. New York City reported a handful more robberies in 2021 than in 2019. Dallas and Detroit, on the other hand, demonstrated significant improvement; Los Angeles, a tad less so.

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So is violent crime up or down? Homicide rates went up between 2019 and 2021 in each city in our cohort, and in Chicago and Detroit substantially so. Aggravated assault rates increased in Chicago, Dallas and Detroit but receded somewhat in Los Angeles and New York City. Robbery numbers, though, mostly decreased. Bottom line: when it comes to crimes whose objective is to injure or kill – i.e., murder and aggravated assault – things are bleak, and particularly so in the poorer cities. Over the

years, the numbers we’ve crunched demonstrate a strong link between poverty and violence, and especially homicide (see, for example, our recent review of ten major cities in [“Woke Up, America.”](#)). That’s borne out here. (Note that we cite Chicago’s Census poverty numbers but they’re generally considered a couple points too low).

City boundaries are artificial constructs. What about neighborhoods, the places where people actually live? Patterning our efforts on [“The Usual Victims”](#), [“Woke up, America!”](#) and [“Fix Those Neighborhoods!”](#) we collected 2019-2021 data on homicide, aggravated assault and robbery for two patrol areas in Los Angeles and two in New York City. Each pair was purposely comprised of one prosperous area and one that’s economically deprived. L.A.’s pair includes LAPD’s well-to-do West Los Angeles sector (pop. 228,000, pov. 11.3%) and chronically poor 77th. Street (pop. 175,000, pov. 30.7%). For New York City the pair includes the 19th. precinct, which covers Manhattan’s wealthy Upper East Side (pop. 220,000, pov. 7.2%) and the 73rd., which serves Brooklyn’s impoverished Brownsville and Ocean Hill areas (pop. 86,000, pov. 29.4%).

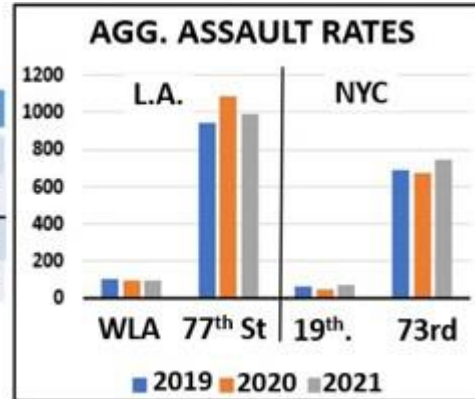
How did these places fare violent-crime-wise? Let’s grab a look.



Div	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
WLA	11.3	1	0.4	4	1.8	0	0
77th	30.7	37	21.1	56	32.0	62	35.4
19th	7.2	0	0	1	0.5	2	0.9
73rd	29.4	11	12.8	25	29.1	23	26.7

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Div	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
WLA	11.3	229	100.4	218	96	221	96.9
77th	30.7	1644	939.4	1903	1087	1726	986.2
19th	7.2	138	62.7	113	51	152	69.1
73rd	29.4	592	688.4	580	674	640	744.2

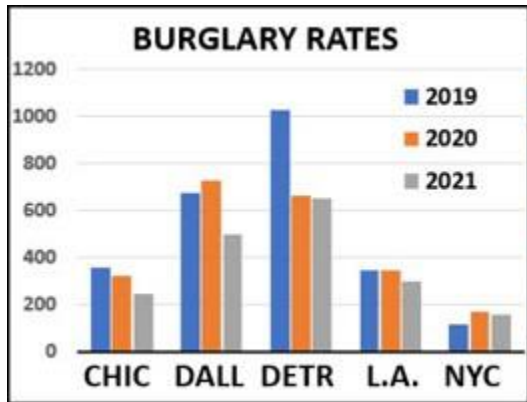


Div	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
WLA	11.3	177	77.6	147	64.5	159	69.7
77th	30.7	198	578.3	236	478.9	262	477.1
19th	7.2	171	77.7	237	107.7	174	79.1
73rd	29.4	293	340.7	250	290.7	230	267.4

Our neighborhoods forays consistently reveal a strong relationship between poverty and violence (see, for example, “[Location, Location, Location](#)” for Los Angeles, and “[Repeat After Us](#),” “[Be Careful What You Brag About](#)” and “[Place Matters](#)” for New York City). As expected, L.A.’s 77th. St. and New York City’s 73rd. endured far higher rates of homicide, aggravated assault and robbery than their prosperous counterparts. Their homicide surge in 2020 – 51.4% in L.A.’s 77th. St., 127.3% in NYC’s 73rd. – seems remarkable. Aggravated assault followed a different pattern. Just like for the city cohort, rates increased at first in Los Angeles and retreated in New York City. On the other hand, robbery, a hybrid crime, was clearly on a downtrend. Most robberies don’t cause physical injury – that’s not their objective – and if it was up to us, we’d assign them to the “property” camp.

[According to the FBI](#), violent and property crimes are continuing to move in opposite directions. In late 2018 violent crime reversed a two-year downtrend and shot back up while property crimes, including burglary, continued a decade-plus plunge. FBI numbers don’t cover all of 2021, so we used city data (sources below) to prepare two burglary graphs, one for the five-city cohort and another for the rich area/poor area comparo.

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	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
Chic	18.4	9578	353.8	8643	320.9	6597	244.9
Dall	17.5	9210	675.6	9917	727.6	6792	498.3
Detr	30.6	6820	1027.9	4361	661.1	4277	648.4
L.A.	16.7	13809	343.9	13773	344.3	11933	298.3
NYC	16.0	9846	117.5	13907	167.5	12794	154.1

Div	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
WLA	11.3	1023	448.7	1059	464.5	946	414.9
77th	30.7	651	372.0	454	259.4	508	290.3
19th	7.2	223	101.4	384	174.5	253	115
73rd	29.4	166	193.0	195	226.7	154	179.1



Burglary charted a seemingly benign course, with rates in each city except New York winding up lower in 2021 than in 2019. But in many areas the threshold for “serious” property crime has increased. For example, in 2014 [California Proposition 47](#) constrained the circumstances under which burglary can be charged. That makes us reluctant to interpret burglary’s recent changes in rate, either between cities or within. So let’s go back to violence. We’ll start with a bit of self-plagiarism from “[Woke up, America!](#)”:

Best we can tell, the middle-class neighborhood where my wife and I reside has been free of violent crime, or any property crime of consequence, for, um, thirty years. Many of our readers can probably boast likewise. To be sure, drive a couple miles one way or the other and things can get gloomy. And that’s within the same city.

That “gloominess” seems to be worsening. A profusion of soul-shattering acts of violence have welcomed the new year. [On January 10th](#) three robbers got into a gunfight with LAPD officer Fernando Arroyos, 27, who was off-duty and house-hunting with his girlfriend in challenged South Los Angeles. Officer Arroyos, a Cal Berkeley grad who had dreamed to be “first in his family to go to college and to be an LAPD officer,” was mortally wounded. On the opposite shore, [an appalling five on-duty NYPD officers](#) were

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shot during the first three weeks of this year. [In the fourth, most recent episode](#), Officer Jason Rivera, a 22-year old rookie, was killed and his partner, Wilbert Mora, 27, a four-year veteran was critically wounded ([sadly, he later passed](#)). Their assailant was a middle-aged man whose mother had called 9-1-1 about his aggressive behavior. She didn't mention – nor apparently, was she asked – if he had a gun. It turned out to be a Glock .45 with a high-capacity magazine.

[Seventy-three](#) American law enforcement officers were feloniously slain in 2021, sixty-one by gunfire. That deplorable toll surpassed the former decade-high sixty-six in 2016. It's also a full one-third worse than in 2019, when forty-eight officers were victims of homicide, and 2020, when forty-six fell. And it's not just cops. An unending stream of news accounts depicts a growing hazard for ordinary folks as well. [On January 13th](#), a homeless man with an extensive criminal record fatally stabbed a beloved UCLA graduate student, Brianna Kupfer, 24, while she was tending to a Los Angeles-area furniture store. [One day later](#) a balloon release marked a pledge by challenged Chicago neighborhoods to “come together and work together” to end the violence that cost the lives of two 14-year olds in separate shootings two days earlier. [One week later](#), in



another troubled Chicago area, eight-year old Melissa Ortega was fatally wounded and several passers-by experienced a near-miss when a 16-year old gang member unleashed a barrage at a rival gangster. Out on probation for two carjackings, the shooter was arrested and (this time) is being held without bond.

Why the carnage is a matter of considerable debate. [According to the New York Times' David Brooks](#), polarization and anger fueled by a host of spiritual, cultural and moral poisons have led America's social compact to come undone:

But something darker and deeper seems to be happening as well — a long-term loss of solidarity, a long-term rise in estrangement and hostility. This is what it feels like to live in a society that is dissolving from the bottom up as much as from the top down.

Los Angeles offers bountiful examples of that “dissolving.” For an example of our society's coming apart at its more privileged levels consider [the June 1, 2021 killing](#) of an L.A. County firefighter, and the wounding of his Captain, by an angry colleague who barged in to the fire station. And for an example of our fracture at the opposite end, there's [the January 22, 2022 gang-related massacre](#) in struggling Inglewood, which took the lives of four persons in their early twenties, including the birthday party's “beautiful young” honoree.

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Police aren't well positioned to keep unstable firefighters from lethally acting out. On the other hand, getting tough on armed thugs is supposedly right up their alley. [Mr. Brooks' employer](#), a news source whose editorial position hasn't often aligned with the cops, recently lent its forum to a Princeton sociologist who thinks that maybe the police *do* play at least one vital role:

We don't have another set of institutions that can deal with the problem of gun violence, or at least we don't have many institutions that can deal with the problem of gun violence. What I would argue is that they should move to the background, and police should be called when a gun is involved.

Dr. Patrick Sharkey isn't suggesting that cops get deeply involved in "ordinary" stuff. But when it comes to gun violence, who *else* is there?

What do *we* think? Grab a peek at "[Full Stop Ahead](#)." Blowback from George Floyd's murder and the constraints of the pandemic set off a flurry of reforms and adjustments that relaxed criminal sanctions, slashed prison and jail terms and reduced the oversight of offenders under supervision and those awaiting trial. [Law enforcement staffing plunged](#) and is yet to recover. Policing was severely dialed back, and proactive anti-crime strategies wound up on the back-back burner. But as violence continues, adjustments seem inevitable. Despite concerns by progressives who welcomed him to office, ex-police captain Eric Adams, New York City's second-ever Black mayor, [is planning to reinstate NYPD's plainclothes teams](#) (albeit, in a seemingly milder form.) And for a real head-snapper consider the situation that Manhattan's new D.A., Alvin Bragg found himself in. [Elected on a progressive, reformist plank](#), he even promised to seek leniency for those caught with a gun. But a sharp rise in violence has led to a "shift in tone." Mr. Bragg recently appointed a special lawyer to handle gun-related work, and "more than fifty" gun possession cases are reportedly in the pipeline.

One of our very first posts, "[Of Hot-Spots and Band-Aids](#)," expressed concern that intensive policing may be thought of as a permanent solution. As our "[Neighborhoods](#)" posts repeatedly implore, focused law enforcement practices can't (and shouldn't) substitute for investments in job training, education, health care and childcare. But when violence and gunplay rule the streets, "[geographically focused policing initiatives](#)" (that's that NIJ calls them) could help prevent the murder of eight-year olds and get society back on track. So maybe it's time to bring cops and out-of-



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mode strategies such as hot-spots policing back into the picture. All that's needed is to get America's badly polarized political class on board.

Alas, *that* chore is definitively beyond our pay grade.