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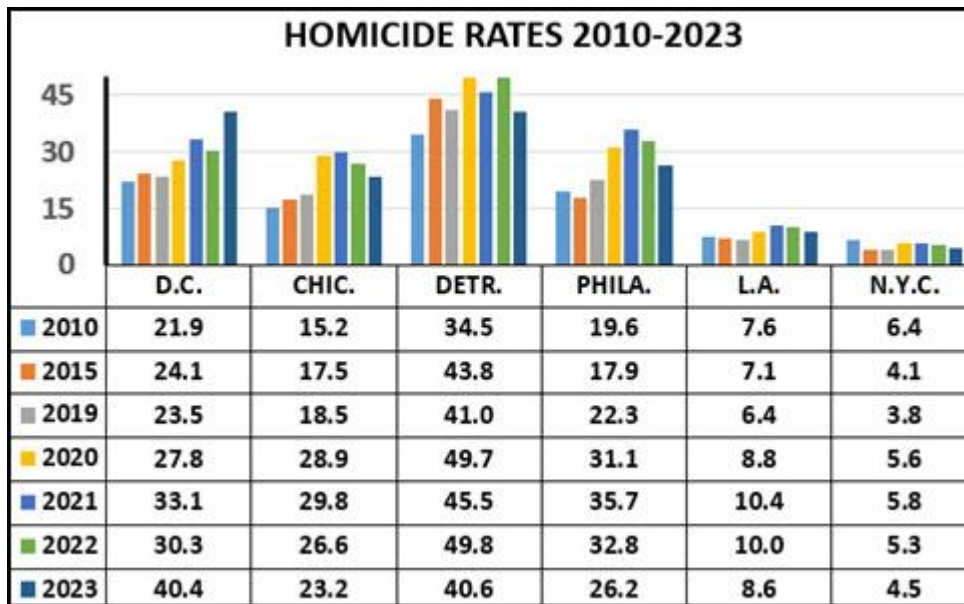
AMERICA'S VIOLENCE-BESET CAPITAL CITY

*Washington, D.C. is plagued by, among other things, murder.
Has the President noticed?*



For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. “We need the National Guard in D.C.” Recently delivered to reporters for the *Washington Post*, Councilmember Trayon White Sr.’s [sobering call to arms](#) aptly conveyed how citizens and officials feel about the Capital District’s unending struggle against crime and violence

Just how bad *are* things? Using numbers from the [Census](#), the FBI’s [Crime Data Explorer](#) and [agency websites](#), here’s where D.C.’s 2010-2023 homicide rates per 100,000 population sit on *Police Issues*’ list of “usual suspects”:



Between 2010-2021, D.C. and each of its companions except the Big Apple experienced steady upticks in homicide. But things turned around in 2022 when all but chronically

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crime-ridden Detroit enjoyed a decline. That so-called “great crime drop” continued in 2023. This time it included Detroit, where the murder rate fell 18.5 percent. But our nation’s capital was sadly left out. During 2023 D.C.’s murder rate increased by an astounding one-third, winding up only two-tenths of a point short of Detroit’s. [According to the Post](#), “the District was deadlier than 55 of the country’s 60 most populous cities, behind only New Orleans, Cleveland, Baltimore and Memphis.”

Alas, the *Post* didn’t publish its data. Usual suspects aside, where does the District sit, crime-wise, among the nation’s major cities? With many agencies, including our hometown LAPD, still not fully aboard the NIBRS, we turned to the Major City Chiefs Association (MCCA). According to [its most recent tally](#), which reports violent crimes from January thru September 2022 and 2023, the news for D.C. really is all bad. Using population figures, we calculated homicide and robbery rate per 100,000 residents and the percent change between 2022-2023 for the MCCA’s fifty-eight member cities. Again, note that these are nine-month rates. Here are comparos between Jan-Sept. 2022 and Jan-Sept. 2023 for the ten cities at each extreme of the murder and robbery spectrums:

HOMICIDE RATES, 58 MAJOR CHIEFS CITIES, JAN-SEPT 2022/23

TEN HIGH RATE	2023		2022-23	TEN LOW RATE	2023		2022-23
	#	RATE	PCT CHG		#	RATE	PCT CHG
1. St. Louis Metro MO	132	46.1	-14.8	49. Virginia Beach VA	22	4.8	29.4
2. New Orleans LA	157	42.5	-25.6	50. Raleigh NC	22	4.6	-35.3
3. Memphis TN	238	38.1	31.5	51. Boston MA	29	4.5	7.4
4. Baltimore MD	207	36.3	-17.9	52. Austin TX	43	4.5	-15.7
5. Cleveland OH	129	35.5	12.2	53. Arlington TX	15	3.8	-11.8
6. Detroit MI	206	32.9	-8.0	54. Long Beach CA	17	3.8	-43.3
7. Washington DC	213	31.7	37.4	55. El Paso TX	24	3.5	26.3
8. Kansas City MO	146	28.7	16.8	56. Omaha NE	17	3.5	-22.7
9. Milwaukee WI	130	23.1	-22.6	57. San Diego CA	36	2.6	-10.0
10. Oakland CA	97	22.5	1.0	58. San Jose CA	20	2.1	5.3

ROBBERY RATES, 58 MAJOR CHIEFS CITIES, JAN-SEPT 2022/23

TEN HIGH RATE	2023		2022-23	TEN LOW RATE	2023		2022-23
	#	RATE	PCT CHG		#	RATE	PCT CHG
1. Oakland CA	2818	654.5	34.6	San Jose CA	630	64.9	1.6
2. Baltimore MD	2276	398.9	-5.2	San Diego CA	888	64.3	-9.1
3. Washington DC	2613	389.0	67.5	Las Vegas NV	981	58.8	-20.2
4. Cleveland OH	1375	378.0	2.1	Fort Worth TX	548	57.8	1.5
5. Memphis TN	2028	324.5	17.5	Tampa FL	228	57.3	-23.7
6. Chicago IL	7845	294.4	25.0	Omaha NE	242	49.9	-20.9
7. Philadelphia PA	3998	255.1	-9.5	Arlington TX	191	48.8	-12.4
8. Milwaukee WI	1435	254.7	3.5	Mesa AZ	217	42.3	-9.2
9. Minneapolis MN	1079	253.8	-23.5	El Paso TX	258	38.0	26.5
10. San Francisco CA	1920	237.5	7.1	Virginia Beach VA	111	24.4	-24.5

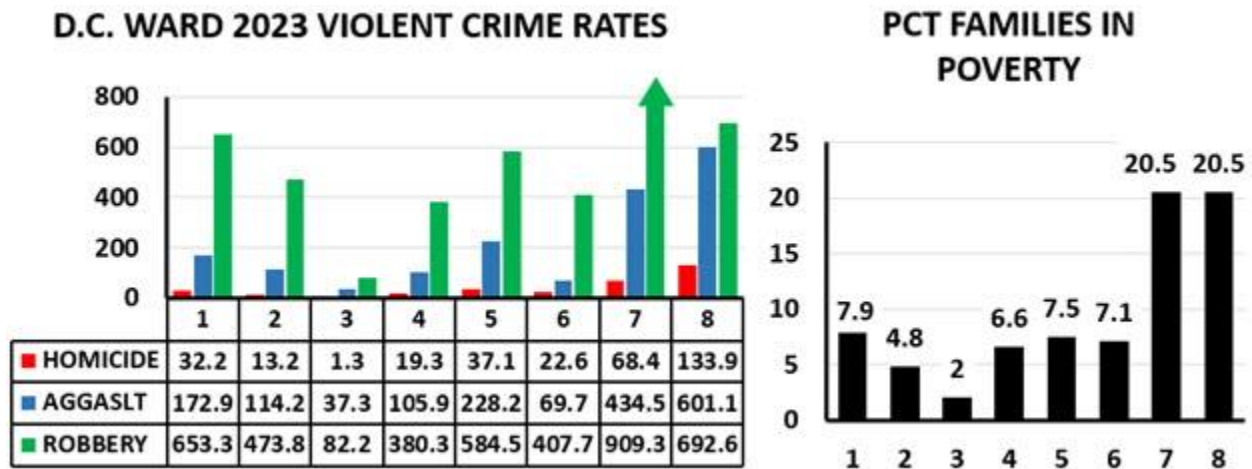
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As of September 30, 2023, Washington D.C. was “only” seventh worst murder-wise. Note that its rate increased thirty-seven percent in 2023, the most recorded by any of its counterparts. Ditto its astounding 67.5 percent leap in robbery, which helped it land in third place, robbery-wise. (We left out aggravated assault. Our review of pre- and post-2019 NIBRS numbers suggested that some agencies have been defining it differently.)

Police Issues is far less concerned with aggregate crime rates than with what’s happening in the neighborhoods where people actually live. As our [Neighborhoods essays](#) frequently point out – most recently, in “[See No Evil – Hear no Evil – Speak no Evil](#)” – economically-challenged places have always absorbed most of the brunt. D.C. councilmember White had plentiful reason to speak out. D.C. has eight Wards, and his – [the Eighth](#) – happens to carry the distinction of being the most dangerous.

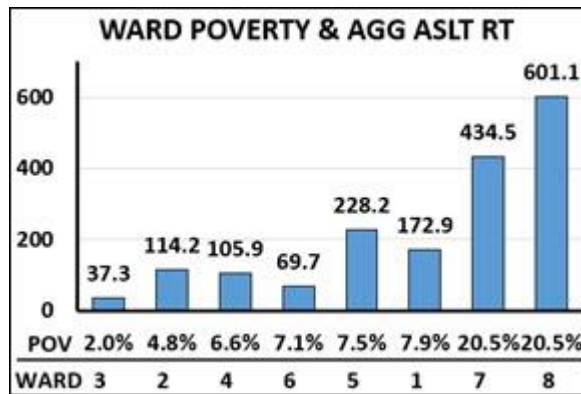
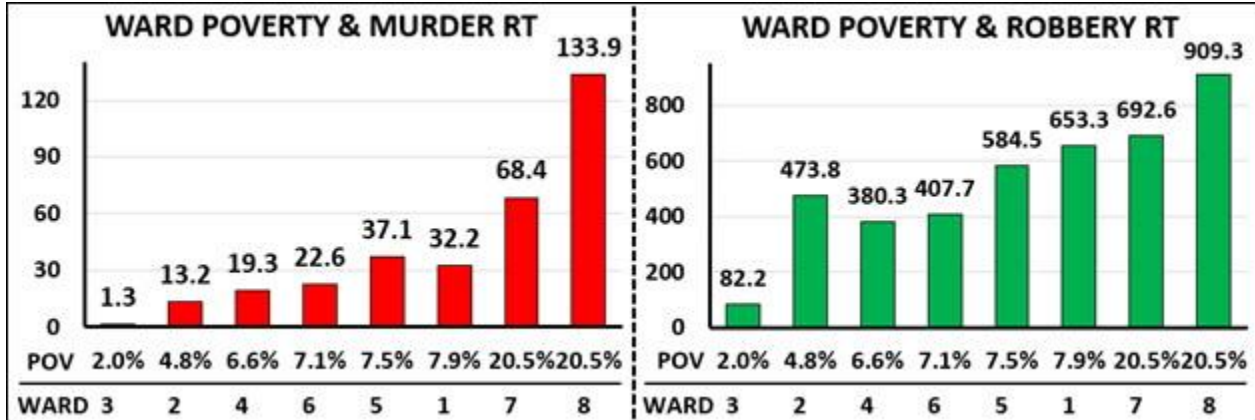
Just *how* dangerous?

We downloaded [2023 crime data](#) from Open Data DC. Our graph and table on the left report full-year rates/100,000 pop. for Homicide, Robbery and Aggravated Assault. And the graph on the right displays [2022 poverty percentages](#) for each of the District’s eight Wards:

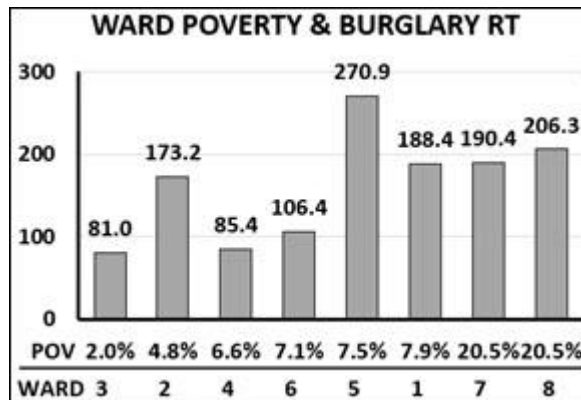


Sure enough, the Eighth can’t be beat. Its homicide rate is *twice* that of its closest competitor, the Seventh. By a comfortable margin, the Eighth is also worst in aggravated assaults and comes in second to the Seventh in robbery. Now check out poverty. The violence-ridden Seventh and Eighth Wards also happen to be far the poorest, while the crime-free Third Ward is (surprise!) the most affluent. These graphs depict poverty’s unholy influence on violent crime:

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And just like in our previous forays (see, most recently, [“Good News/Bad News”](#)), the relationship between poverty and the serious property crime of burglary is far less pronounced:



Crime	<i>r</i>
Homicide	0.91
Robbery	0.83
Agg Aslt	0.95
Burglary	0.45

The *r* coefficient is used to depict the strength of relationships (*r*'s range from zero, or none, to 1, or a perfect, lock-step association). All the *r*'s are “positive” (+), meaning that crime rates and percent in poverty increase and decrease together. But while poverty and violent crimes seem very closely associated, the relationship between poverty

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and burglary is only moderate.

None of this should come as a surprise to the District's political establishment and its hard-pressed residents. While the national media gloats about the supposedly steep decline in America's crime rates (check out, say, [NBC](#) and [ABC](#)), the *Washington Post* keeps running stories about the District's problems with violence. And yes, they have suggestions. A few days ago its editorial board penned "[A Crime-free D.C. Starts With Drug-free Zones](#)." It favors having police (once again) designate "crime hot-spots" where drug possession and use are forbidden. And keeping persons accused of violent crimes in jail from arrest through trial. And broadening the definition of "carjacking." And having all cases involving "organized retail theft" classified as felonies. And even getting cops to enforce the civil laws against fare evasion.

Indeed, these provisions (and more) were part of "[Addressing Crime Trends Now Act \(ACT Now\)](#)", a D.C. bill that Mayor Muriel Bowser introduced last October. Touted as "New Legislation to Support Safe and Effective Policing", it would supposedly enhance "accountability for those who choose to commit crimes and inflict fear in our neighborhoods." Long-standing legal constraints that have "made it more difficult for police to keep the community safe and hold criminals accountable for their actions" would also be relaxed:

The new legislation clarifies the distinction between a serious use of force and incidental contact with the neck, ensures officers can review their body-worn camera footage prior to writing their initial police report in certain circumstances, makes permanent clarification of vehicular pursuit, and defines what information will be posted publicly related to officer discipline and more.

George Floyd forever altered the socio-political landscape in which cops work. One consequence was that police agencies across the U.S. abandoned long-standing practices such as stop-and-frisk. To be sure, after considerable fiddling, some cautiously returned them to the shelf. And as one would expect, there's been blowback. Only two weeks before the *Post*'s editors championed "drug-free zones" its lowly reporters authored [a story](#) that concluded the Mayor and D.C. Council had "turned away from progressive strategies meant to ease the footprint of law enforcement in the community". [Hot-spots was back!](#) (Officials, though, insist that its new, improved incarnation incorporates the very best aspects of "community policing".)

It's not that we oppose being pro-active. After all, hot-spots *does* carry [NIJ's seal of approval](#). But several weeks ago, as we looked for something to write about, our attention fell on a *Post* reader's skeptical reaction to the rebirth of "crime-free drug zones":

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I don't think incarceration is going to do much but just fill prisons. But I don't think excusing it and never calling out family structure break-down, kids with no boundary setting parents, etc, is the answer either. Because it's my neighbors and my neighborhood and my community that winds up carrying the brunt of all of this weaponized empathy

Bingo! Let's get back to the basics! Really, no matter how well policing is done, it's *not* the ultimate solution. As we often do, let's self-plagiarize from "[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)":

Preventing violence is a task for society. As we've repeatedly pitched, a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities, language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing could yield vast benefits.

To be sure, the District would need a considerable chunk of change to give its needy neighborhoods a chance to prosper. Yet D.C. *is* America's capital. It should exemplify our nation's very *best*. Not, as things stand, its very *worst*. (Well, *almost* very worst. Thanks, Detroit!). Perhaps Silly Circus (that's what your author and his Federal colleagues called the Secret Service) could apprise the Chief of what's happening all around him, twenty-four/seven. He clearly doesn't know.