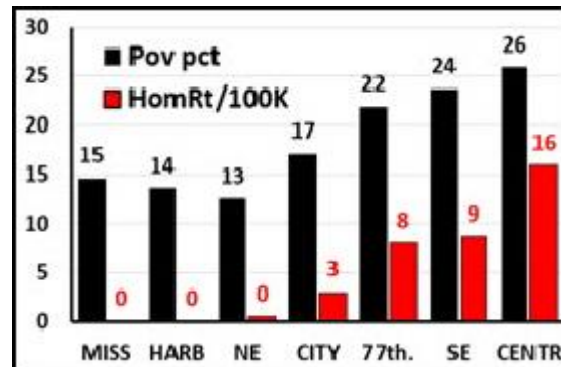


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GOOD NEWS / BAD NEWS

When citywide crime “falls,” who really benefits?



For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Our attention was recently drawn to a *Los Angeles Times* piece with an unusually explicit Internet link: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-06-01/crime-is-down-in-la-as-city-plans-to-expand-lapd>. Entitled “What the latest police numbers show about crime in L.A., San Francisco and West Hollywood”, its message (greedy cops) was so obvious that progressively-minded readers might have been forgiven for simply nodding and moving on.

But as a long-time, home-delivery subscriber, we dove in. And quickly realized that the supposedly well-researched article was really just another feel-good account about L.A.’s citywide crime decline. Citing police data, it reported that L.A.’s 2023 violent crime rate was “more than 10%” lower than for the same Jan. 1-May 20 period last year. Homicide, in particular, had plunged a substantial twenty-seven percent. (Click [here](#) for our saved version of an LAPD report containing city-wide crime numbers for January 1-May 27 periods in 2021, 2022 and 2023.)

Forgive us if we’re not impressed. As our [neighborhoods essays](#) have long harped, people live and work in places whose characteristics can’t be accurately depicted with citywide scores. “[What’s Up? Violence. Where? Where Else?](#)” compared neighborhoods across Los Angeles and New York City. “[Don’t Divest – Invest](#)” did so for Portland and Minneapolis. And “[Punishment Isn’t a Cop’s Job \(II\)](#)” focused on Memphis. It’s long been our practice to focus on crime rates in areas *within* cities. And we always bring their poverty rates along. No, it’s not because we think that poverty “causes” crime. After all, most poor people are perfectly law-abiding. But poverty has proven to be a worthy

surrogate indicator for a host of more proximate factors, from gang activity to unemployment, that are closely linked to violence.

Here we’re doing it again, and again for L.A. Our top image displays poverty and homicide rates per 100,000 population between January 1 and May 27, 2023 for six LAPD geographical Divisions (there are twenty-one) that populate the extremes of the homicide spectrum, with three at each end. L.A.’s “citywide” rate is in the middle. These tables extend that comparo to five Divisions at each end, and expands coverage to include the other two major crimes of violence: aggravated assault and robbery:

L.A. 2023 homicide rates			L.A. 2023 agg aslt rates			L.A. 2023 robbery rates		
5 lowest	Rate	Pct pov	5 lowest	Rate	Pct pov	5 lowest	Rate	Pct pov
Mission	0.0	14.6	West L.A.	47.3	10.3	West LA	25.1	10.3
Harbor	0.0	13.6	Devonsh	75.9	10.8	Devonsh	36.4	10.8
Northeast	0.5	12.5	Northeast	89.4	12.5	Foothill	37.7	10.2
West Valley	0.5	10.5	Foothill	104.4	10.2	Mission	40.8	14.6
Foothill	0.5	10.2	Pacific	107.0	7.2	WValley	46.1	10.5
Avg	0.3	12.3	Avg	84.8	10.2	Avg	37.2	11.3
5 highest	Rate	Pct pov	5 highest	Rate	Pct pov	5 highest	Rate	Pct pov
Rampart	6.3	23.1	Rampart	295.9	23.1	Hollywood	128.0	14.0
Hollenbeck	6.5	20.1	Newton	363.9	36.3	Southeast	153.3	23.7
77th St.	8.0	21.9	Southeast	417.3	23.7	Newton	154.5	36.3
Southeast	8.6	23.7	77th St.	446.4	21.9	77th St.	201.3	21.9
Central	15.9	25.9	Central	748.7	25.9	Central	351.1	25.9
Avg	9.1	22.9	Avg	454.4	26.2	Avg	197.6	24.4
Citywide	2.7	17.1	Citywide	192.1	17.1	Citywide	81.8	17.1

Crime rates were computed using LAPD Division crime stat’s and population figures. Division poverty scores were produced as in “[Does Race Drive Policing?](#)”, by overlaying precinct and ZIP code maps, then averaging [Census poverty statistics](#). Divisions appear in both groups (“lowest” and “highest”) by their crime rate, from least to most.

Within each crime type, comparing the five lowest and five highest crime-burdened precincts yields stark differences in crime rates and percent of the population in poverty. High-homicide rate precincts, for example, have an average homicide rate (9.1) that’s *more than thirty times* that of their low-homicide counterparts (0.3). Their average poverty score is also twice as high. Like contrasts are evident for aggravated assault and robbery. And that’s not just something that came about in 2023. In the next set of tables we use [saved LAPD data](#) to extend our coverage to equivalent periods in 2021 and 2022 (# represents the actual number of crimes). We begin with homicide:

LAPD Divisions w/lowest 2023 Jan-May homicide rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
Mission	14.6	2	0.8	4	1.6	0	0.0	-100%	-100%
Harbor	13.6	15	8.3	4	2.2	0	0.0	-100%	-100%
Northeast	12.5	7	3.2	2	0.9	1	0.5	-86%	-50%
West Valley	10.5	6	3.0	4	2.0	1	0.5	-83%	-75%
Foothill	10.2	3	1.5	5	2.5	1	0.5	-67%	-80%
Avg	12.3		3.4		1.9		0.3	-87%	-81%

LAPD Divisions w/highest 2023 Jan-May homicide rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
Rampart	34.5	8	5.0	8	5.0	10	6.3	25%	26%
Hollenbeck	24.1	15	8.8	9	5.3	11	6.5	-27%	23%
77th St.	26.6	16	8.5	29	15.5	15	8.0	-6%	-48%
Southeast	24.8	18	11.9	19	12.6	13	8.6	-28%	-32%
Central	35.8	9	11.0	9	11.0	13	15.9	44%	45%
Avg	29.2		9.1		9.9		9.1	2%	3%

Citywide	17.1		4.1		4.3		3.3	-20%	-23%
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Here's aggravated assault:

LAPD Divisions w/lowest 2023 Jan-May agg. aslt. rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
West L.A	10.3	90	37.0	111	45.7	115	47.3	28%	4%
Devonshire	10.8	168	72.9	206	89.4	175	75.9	4%	-15%
Northeast	12.5	232	106.4	228	104.5	195	89.4	-16%	-14%
Foothill	10.2	235	119.7	227	115.6	205	104.4	-13%	-10%
Pacific	7.2	346	158.2	295	134.9	234	107.0	-32%	-21%
Avg	10.2		98.8		98.0		84.8	-6%	-11%

LAPD Divisions w/highest 2023 Jan-May agg. aslt. rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
Rampart	23.1	455	284.6	473	295.9	473	295.9	4%	0%
Newton	36.3	446	298.3	508	339.8	544	363.9	22%	7%
Southeast	23.7	637	422.6	720	477.7	629	417.3	-1%	-13%
77th St.	21.9	868	463.4	843	450.1	836	446.4	-4%	-8%
Central	25.9	515	630.0	631	771.9	612	748.7	19%	-3%
Avg	26.2		419.8		467.1		454.4	8%	-3%

Citywide	17.1		216.3		232.8		219.5	1.4%	-6%
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And here's robbery:

LAPD Divisions w/lowest 2023 Jan-May robbery rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
West L.A	10.3	66	27.2	72	29.6	61	25.1	-8%	-15%
Foothill	10.2	63	32.1	82	41.8	74	37.7	17%	-10%
West Valley	10.5	70	34.7	126	62.4	93	46.1	33%	-26%
Devonshire	10.8	83	36.0	103	44.7	84	36.4	1%	-19%
Topanga	11.8	77	37.1	102	49.2	110	53.0	43%	8%
Avg	10.7		33.4		45.5		39.7	17%	-12%

LAPD Divisions w/highest 2023 Jan-May robbery rates									
	Pct pov	2021		2022		2023		Chg	Chg
		#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate	21-23	22-23
Newton	36.3	197	131.8	281	188.0	231	154.5	17%	-18%
Southeast	23.7	224	148.6	299	198.4	231	153.3	3%	-23%
Hollywood	14	210	160.0	259	197.4	168	128.0	-20%	-35%
77th St.	21.9	358	191.1	452	241.3	377	201.3	5%	-17%
Central	25.9	274	335.2	339	414.7	287	351.1	5%	-15%
Avg	24.4		193.3		247.9		197.6	2%	-22%

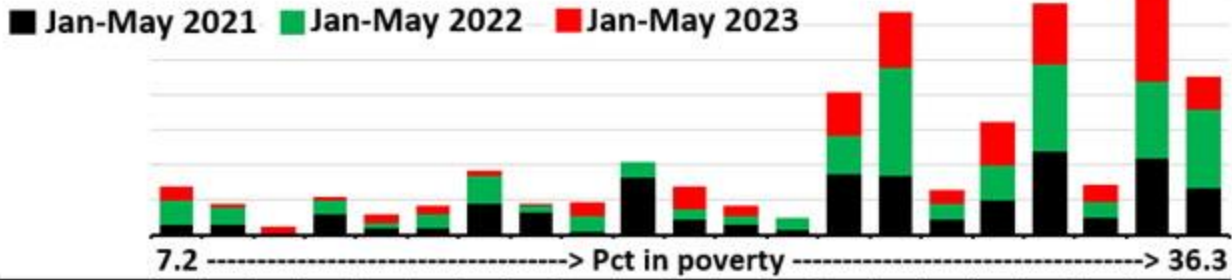
Citywide	17.1		92.2		112.1		94.2	2%	-16%
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Average poverty scores for the highest-rate groups was substantially higher than for the lowest-rate groups for each year and crime type. Really, the pronounced connection between violent crime and poverty could hardly be more obvious. And unlike those comparatively benevolent “citywide” crime numbers (you know, the ones that the bosses like to brag about), the crime rates rates of “highest-crime” precincts didn’t consistently improve.

It’s not that the worker-bees are ignoring the obvious. That violence/poverty connection clearly influences how cops go about their business. In “[Does Race Drive Policing?](#)” we used [2022 LAPD RIPA stop data](#) along with [2019 LAPD arrest data](#) and [Census ZIP code data](#) to confirm that Black and Hispanic persons are more likely to be stopped and arrested. No, it’s not because most cops are racists. It’s because Blacks and Hispanics disproportionately inhabit the economically disadvantaged areas whose chronically elevated levels of violence draw increased police attention. (It’s not the first time we’ve pointed that out, nor criticized the *L.A. Times* for jumping to conclusions. See our 2019 two-parter, “Did the *Times* Scapegoat L.A.’s Finest? [I](#) [II](#)”).

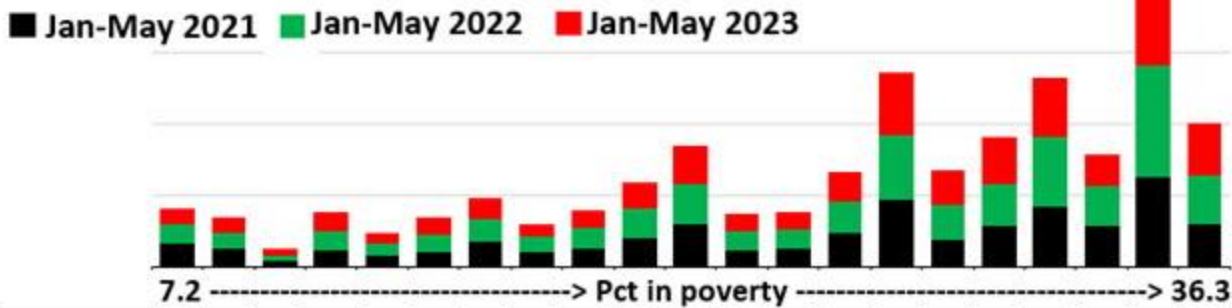
That’s all well and good. But our exploration here has only touched on the extremes. LAPD has twenty-one field Divisions. What about the city as a whole?

Homicide rates/100K, 21 LAPD Divisions, by pct. poverty



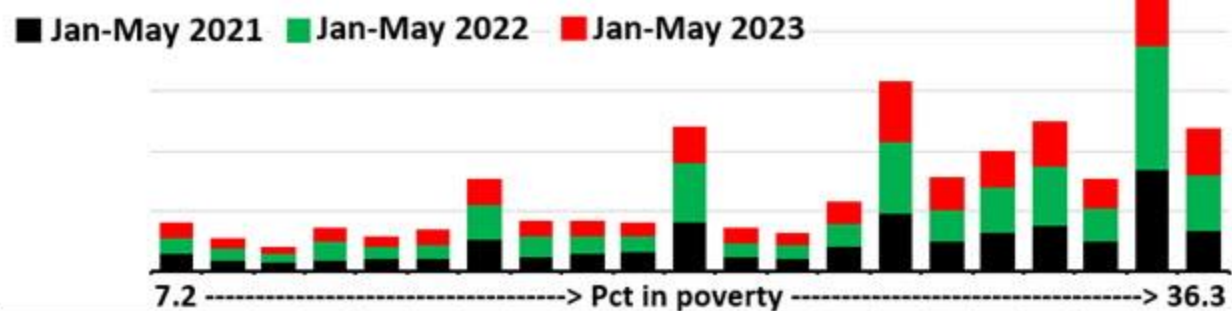
Rates 2023	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	3	2	0	6	8	2	6	9	3	16	5
Rates 2022	4	3	0	2	1	2	4	1	2	2	2	1	2	5	15	2	5	13	2	11	11
Rates 2021	1	2	0	3	1	1	5	3	0	8	2	2	1	9	9	2	5	12	3	11	7

Agg. Aslt. rates/100K, 21 LAPD Divisions, by pct. poverty



Rates 2023	107	104	47	140	76	122	154	89	124	182	258	129	117	199	446	245	325	417	215	749	364
Rates 2022	135	116	46	134	89	128	158	105	147	206	290	131	129	220	450	245	296	478	278	772	340
Rates 2021	158	120	37	111	73	97	169	106	125	195	292	113	131	238	463	191	285	423	288	630	298

Robbery rates/100K, 21 LAPD Divisions, by pct. poverty

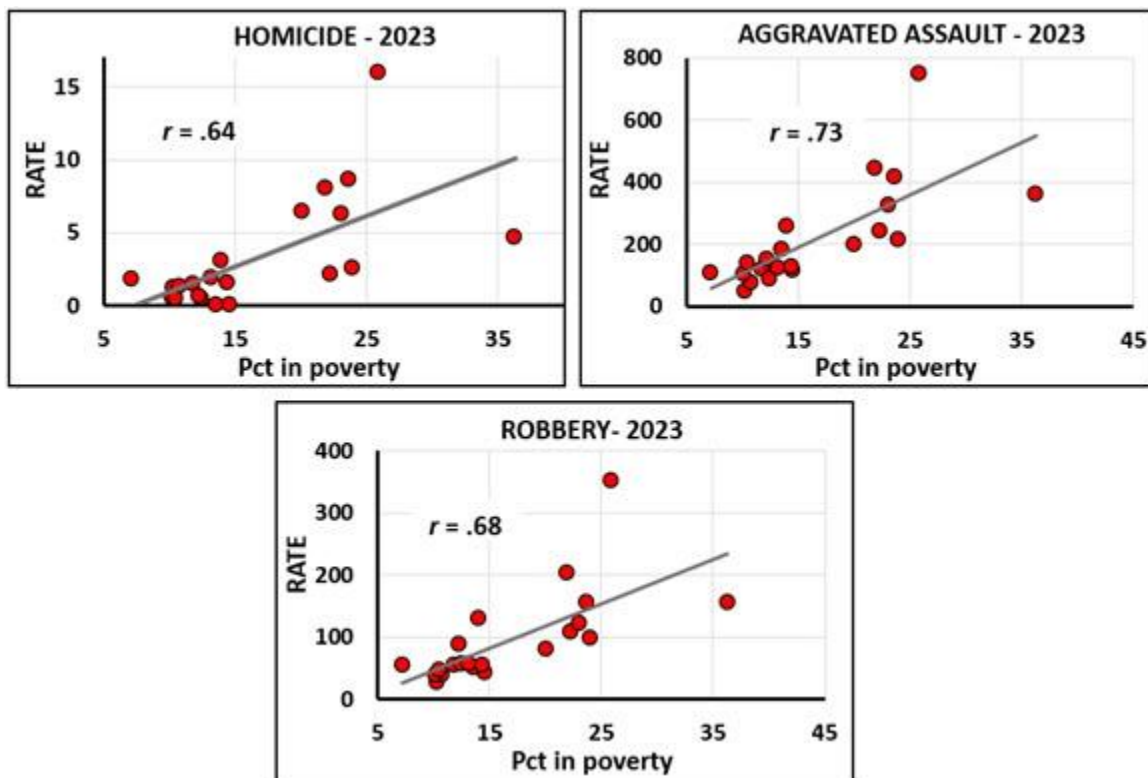


Rates 2023	52	38	25	46	36	53	86	54	55	49	128	53	41	79	201	106	119	153	97	351	155
Rates 2022	55	42	30	62	45	49	116	69	56	52	197	50	46	72	241	106	155	198	111	415	188
Rates 2021	55	32	27	35	36	37	104	44	57	60	160	43	37	81	191	99	124	149	99	335	132

These graphs arrange LAPD's twenty-one field Divisions by percent of residents in poverty, from lowest poverty precinct (7.2 percent) on the left, to highest poverty

precinct (36.3 percent) on the right. On first glance, crime rates appear to substantially worsen at the higher levels of deprivation. To more precisely assess the relationships between our “variables” – poverty and crime type – we computed “*r*” scores (coefficient of correlation) from January-May 2023 crime data. [The “*r*” statistic ranges from zero to plus or minus one. Zero means no relationship between variables: they move up and down independently. A substantial “plus” score – say, .50 or higher – suggests that the variables move up and down together. A substantial “minus” score also means that they change in sync, but move in opposite directions.]

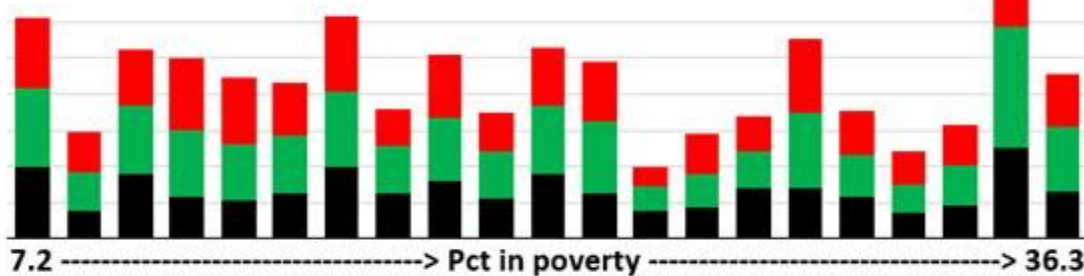
Our results show strong, positive *r*’s between poverty and each violent crime type: .64 between poverty rate and homicide, .73 between poverty rate and aggravated assault, and .68 between poverty rate and robbery. Here are the “scattergrams” (each dot represents a Division):



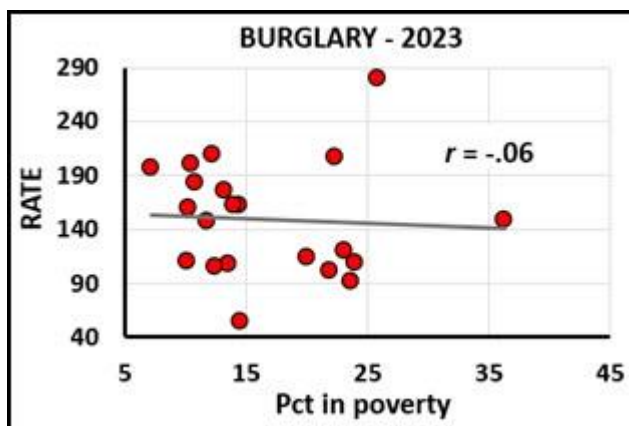
Fine, poverty and violence go together. But does that extend to serious property crime? Say, burglary? Here’s that comparo:

Burglary rates/100K, 21 LAPD Divisions, by pct. poverty

■ Jan-May 2021 ■ Jan-May 2022 ■ Jan-May 2023



Rates 2023	196	110	160	200	183	147	209	105	176	107	162	162	54	114	101	206	120	91	108	279	148
Rates 2022	218	108	187	183	157	163	208	131	175	128	190	202	67	92	101	206	119	80	111	336	178
Rates 2021	197	77	180	115	104	123	200	123	159	112	179	125	75	85	139	141	114	71	93	250	130



As the near-zero r demonstrates, poorer areas of Los Angeles don't generally suffer from higher rates of burglary. And that's to be expected. Considering the places where material goods worthy of stealing can be found, serious property offenses should be far more evenly distributed across the economic spectrum than violent crime. (That's especially so in California, which in 2014 [reclassified as misdemeanors](#) most thefts whose value doesn't exceed \$950.)

So what's the uptake? As "[Place Matters](#)" pointed out, cities that are blessed with lots of prosperous neighborhoods (e.g., the Big Apple and L.A.) flaunt aggregate crime scores that don't reflect the violent realities that their less well-off residents face. But leave honest reporting aside. How is the violence that besets poor areas best approached? Let's self-plagiarize from "[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)":

Yet no matter how well it's done, policing is clearly not the ultimate solution. 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.

Couldn't have said it better ourselves! Oh, wait...