

NEIGHBORHOODS ESSAYS

By

Julius Wachtel

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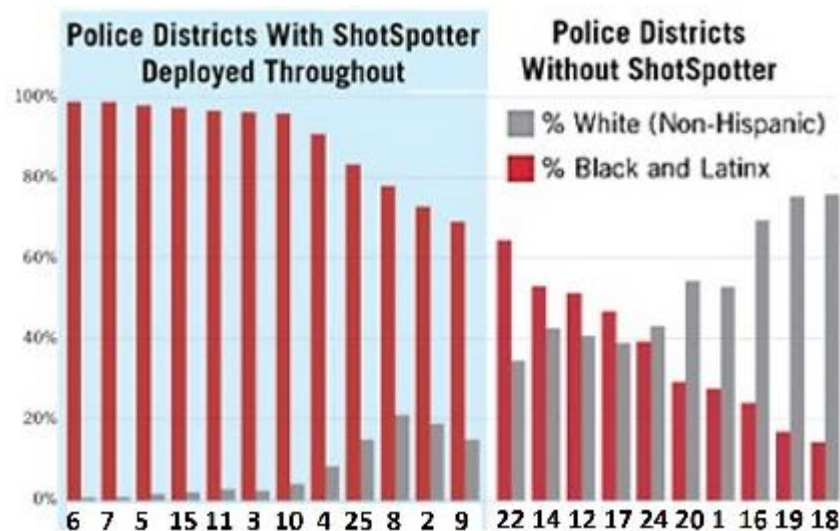
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Posted 3/19/22

A SHOW-STOPPER FOR SHOT-SPOTTER?

Gunshot detection technology leads progressives to cry foul



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Nowadays accusations of racially-biased policing seem commonplace. Problem is, law enforcement has always been an incubator of conflict. Given the complexities of policing, why officers sometimes act imprudently can be difficult to pin down. So when a respected organization [such as the ACLU](#) claims that a popular and supposedly objective law enforcement tool can make things worse one must simply have a look.

We're talking gunshot detection. [A comprehensive report](#) by Chicago's Inspector General focuses on [ShotSpotter](#), whose sensors are at work in [over one-hundred American cities](#). In Chicago they cover about half of the city's police districts. Alerts don't go directly to CPD. Instead, [they're electronically transmitted](#) to ShotSpotter, where analysts work around the clock to filter out fireworks and non-firearm noises "and publish confirmed gunshots to police."

[According to the MacArthur Center](#), though, Chicago's deployment of ShotSpotter – it's at work in twelve of twenty-two districts – does no good. Instead, it "tracks and exacerbates Chicago's racial divide":

The Chicago Police Department has a long history of excessive force, illegal and discriminatory stop-and-frisk, and other abusive policies and practices. ShotSpotter is a tool and tactic that contributes to these problems. It exacerbates

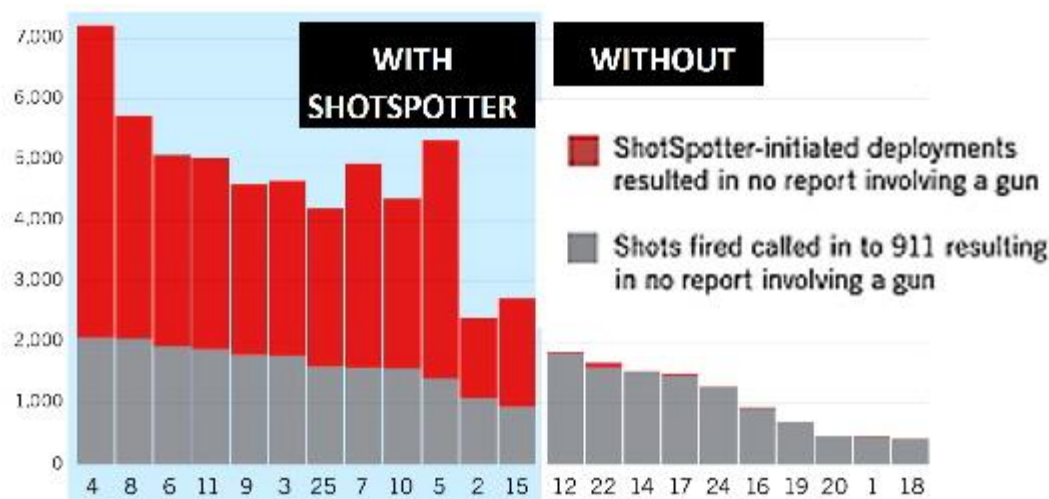
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police bias towards marginalized communities and foments distrust and fear among residents.

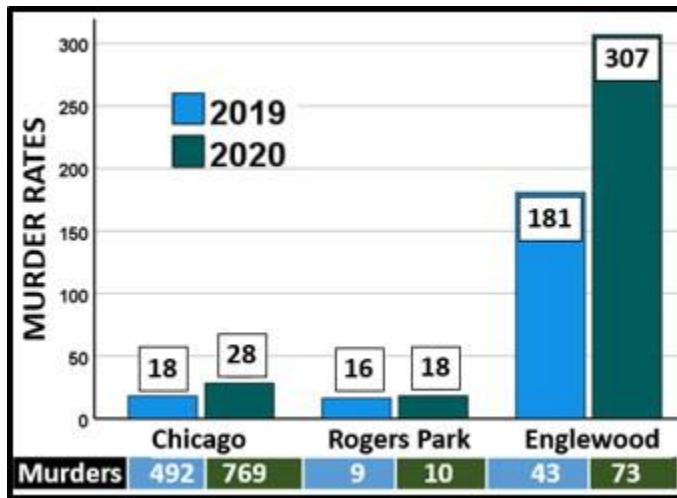
In a recent court filing the Center submitted the above graphic (we slightly tweaked it to fit). As they point out, it illustrates that sensors are only located in police districts that are predominantly populated by persons of color.

Of course, if ShotSpotter worked as advertised, its deployment would be welcomed by everyone but criminals. MacArthur, though, insists that the technology [is fundamentally defective](#). Chicago P.D. officers reportedly answered 46,743 ShotSpotter alerts between July 1, 2019 and April 14, 2021. But in only 5,114 instances – 10.9% – did cops confirm that a gun-related event actually took place. (And in only 14 percent that a crime even occurred.) Bottom line: “There is no good evidence that ShotSpotter can reliably distinguish the sound of gunfire from other loud, impulsive noises.”

MacArthur’s filing includes [a second image](#) (see below) that depicts unverified gunfire alerts from both ShotSpotter and citizen 911 calls. It supposedly illustrates how Chicago uses exaggerated accounts of gunplay in areas predominantly populated by persons of color to justify “racialized and oppressive patterns of policing” (i.e., intensive enforcement, stop-and-frisk, etc.)



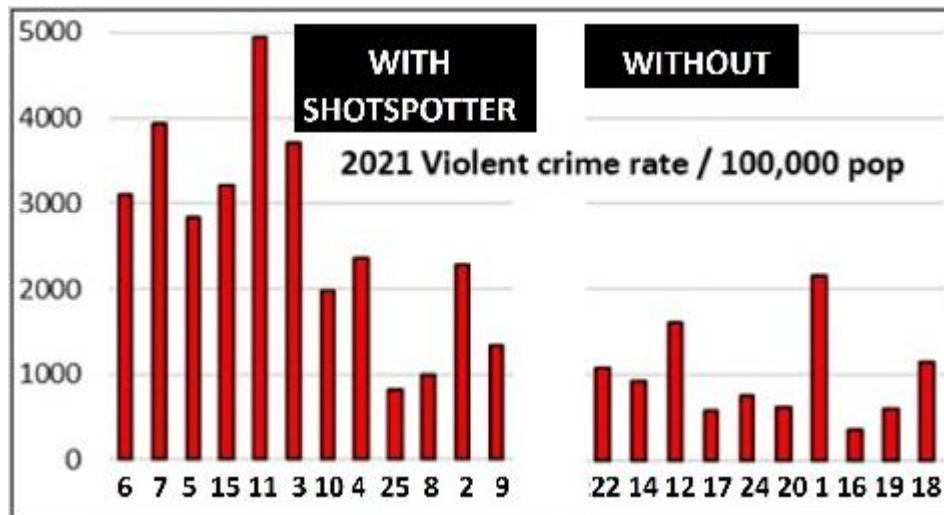
MacArthur’s analysis was triggered by an actual killing, which is discussed below. But first, what *should* count? Considering the realities of the urban environment, the Center’s insistence that reports of gunfire are meaningless unless they’re confirmed seems unrealistic. If there are no suspects at hand and no one got hurt, expecting busy cops to, say, scour sidewalks and streets for bullet casings seems a stretch.

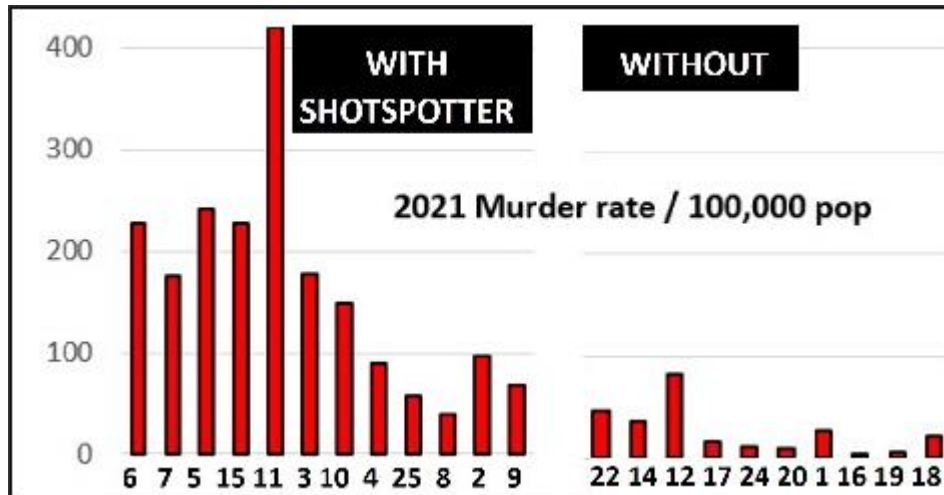


That Chicago singled out twelve districts is not in doubt. What is in question is *why*. And we have a pretty good idea. Our “[Neighborhoods](#)” essays have consistently demonstrated **that poverty, which disproportionately burdens persons of color, is strongly associated with violence**. This image from “[The Usual Victims](#)” contrasts murders and murder rates for two Chicago neighborhoods, Rogers Park (24th. police district, no ShotSpotter) and Englewood (7th. police district,

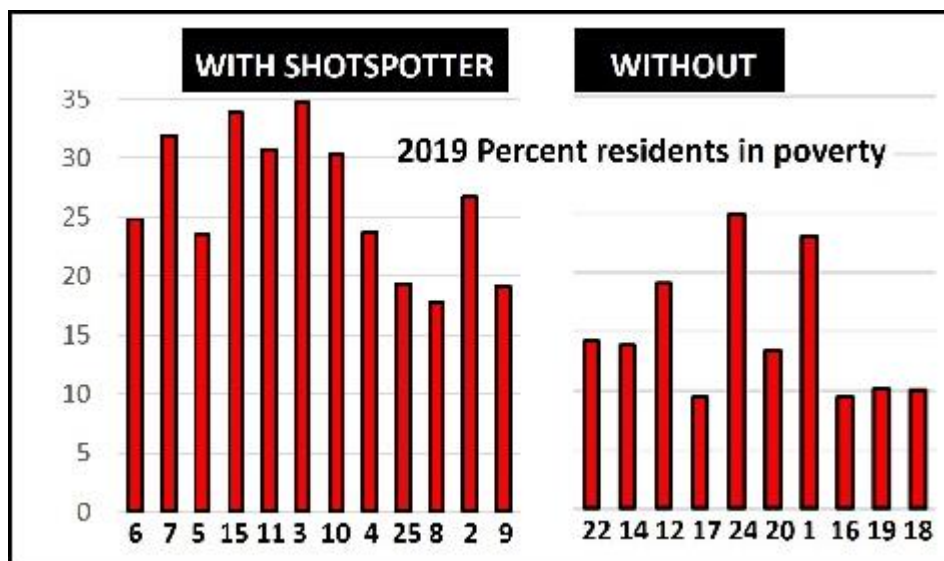
with ShotSpotter). Rogers Park, pop. 51,270, is 41.9% White and its [poverty level is 26.3%](#). Englewood, pop. 26,025, is 95% Black and its [poverty level is 46.3%](#).

Our present inquiry uses [Chicago PD crime data](#) to probe poverty and violence in the precincts identified by MacArthur. Since police district and neighborhood boundaries differ, police district populations are from [johnkeefe.net](#). His tallies reflect the 2010 census but remain useful for comparison. Our graphs follow MacArthur’s format, with the twelve police districts that deploy ShotSpotter on the left, and the ten that don’t on the right.





It takes only a glance to confirm that ShotSpotter deployment is biased towards the high-violence precincts. As for the link with economic conditions, the below graph reports percentage of residents in poverty at each precinct's ZIP from the [2019 ACS](#).



As one would expect, higher-violence precincts tend to be substantially poorer. Such as the 10th., where nearly one in three live in poverty. That's where [a ShotSpotter device reported gunfire](#) during the early morning hours of March 29, 2021. As police arrived an adult male and his 13-year old companion, Adam Toledo, ran off. Toledo had a gun, and within moments an officer reportedly mistook a gesture as a lethal threat and shot the teen dead. (For more about the encounter see "[Regulate. Don't Obfuscate.](#)" For a recent news article about the episode click [here.](#))

Responses to reports of gunfire can place cops and citizens – both innocent and not-so-innocent – at considerable risk. But until recently we didn't know that a ShotSpotter

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alert – again, in Chicago – supposedly led to a wrongful arrest for murder. On May 31, 2020, Chicago resident Michael Williams, 64 brought Safarain Herring, 25 to an emergency room. [Herring had been shot dead](#). Williams told police he was giving Herring a ride when gunfire rang out from a passing vehicle. But video from the gunshot location identified by ShotSpotter showed Williams' car. And it was parked.

There was apparently little other evidence. Williams's criminal history – he had served prison terms for attempted murder, robbery and a gun crime – may have sealed his fate. He was arrested and jailed pending trial. Months later public defenders submitted [an elaborate Frye motion](#) that criticized ShotSpotter's technical claims as “unscientific and reckless.” What's more, ShotSpotter employees were accused of purposely changing the location of the gunfire to where the video depicted Williams' vehicle had parked. MacArthur lawyers [joined in with a motion](#) contending that ShotSpotter grossly exaggerates how much gunfire actually takes place.

Vice Media quickly [posted the juiciest parts](#) of the damning assessments online. The *Associated Press* followed up with [a major investigative piece](#) that blasted ShotSpotter. Its work was picked up by news outlets throughout the U.S.

Alas, the *Frye* motions on which the newsies relied weren't totally accurate. Among other things, ShotSpotter employees didn't change the location of the gunfire: they had always mapped it at the same intersection. The original street address was incorrect, though, so that was (innocently) changed. ShotSpotter demanded retractions; ultimately, every outlet but *Vice* apparently complied. (Scroll to the end of [AP's news piece](#) to read its correction.) As for *Vice*, [ShotSpotter's suing](#). Still, the ruckus didn't help the criminal case. In February 2022, after Williams had spent nearly one year locked up, prosecutors dismissed the case for lack of evidence.

[Chicago's contract with ShotSpotter](#) runs through August 2023. Two years earlier, only five days after *AP's* original blast, the city's Inspector General issued a report report disparaging the technology's usefulness. In line with MacArthur's findings, the IG suggested that ShotSpotter was actually making things worse:

CPD responses to ShotSpotter alerts rarely produce evidence of a gun-related crime, rarely give rise to investigatory stops, and even less frequently lead to the recovery of gun crime-related evidence during an investigatory stop...Additionally, from qualitative review of ISR narratives, OIG found evidence that CPD members' generalized perceptions of the frequency of ShotSpotter alerts in a given area may be substantively changing policing behavior.

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However, the door was left somewhat open. After all, poor police recordkeeping (meaning, about the circumstances of ShotSpotter calls) could be “obstructing a meaningful analysis of the effectiveness of the technology.”

Academic reviews of ShotSpotter’s usefulness are decidedly mixed. [An early \(1998\) study](#) of gunshot detection technology (GDT) reported that it “accurately detected” 80 percent of test shots and accurately placed 72 percent. While GDT seemed to work well for pistols and shotguns, though, it was stumped by an MP-5 assault rifle. A study of a selected neighborhood also revealed that police were responding somewhat *less* quickly to GDT alerts than to citizen calls. Most importantly, there were *nearly three times as many* of the former. Whether that reflected GDT’s technical failings or citizen underreporting of gunfire couldn’t be determined. But GDT caused officer workloads to skyrocket. Two decades later, though, [a DOJ-funded evaluation](#) of ShotSpotter in Denver, Milwaukee and Richmond (Calif.) concluded that GDT actually *reduced* response times:

Evaluation findings suggest that GDT [gunshot detection technology] is generally but not consistently associated with faster response times and more evidence collection, with impact on crime more uneven but generally cost-beneficial. We also conclude that agencies should implement GDT sensors strategically, train officers thoroughly, ensure that GDT data are used and integrated with other systems, and engage with community members early and often.

In the end, there is little to suggest that gunshot detection technology can lessen firearms violence. [A study of gun homicides](#) in 68 “large metropolitan counties” between 1999-2016 reported that ShotSpotter “has no significant impact on firearm-related homicides or arrest outcomes.” Really, expecting a narrow technical approach to ameliorate the consequences of America’s murderous affair with the gun seems a stretch. Being promptly alerted to gunfire seems like a good idea. But doing it right can require a large police force and prove *very* expensive, to say nothing of intrusive. In this highly fraught, post-George Floyd era, we might do better by keeping things at a lower key and investing in *human* capital.

You know, our *neighborhoods*. And their *cops*.

Posted 1/20/24

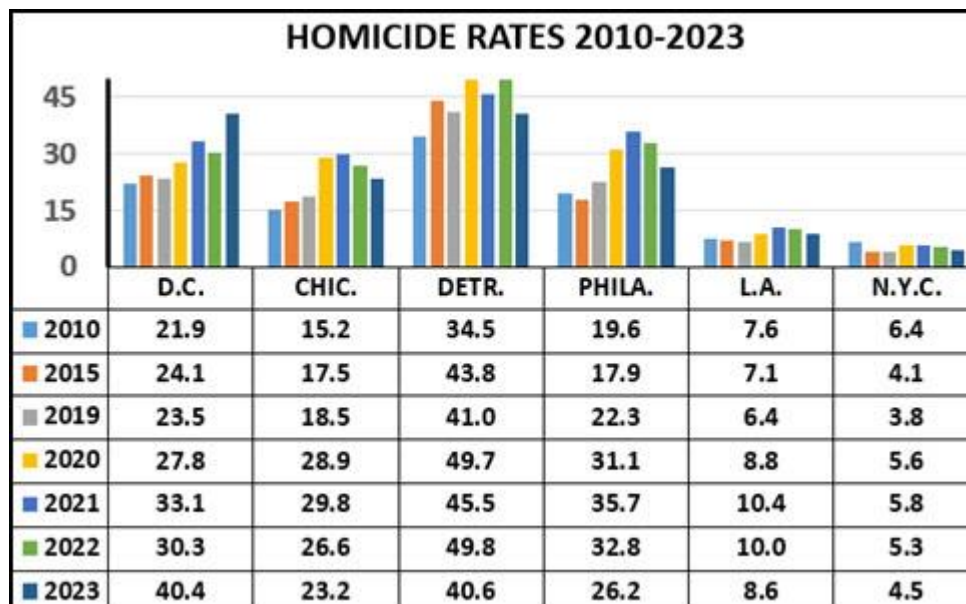
AMERICA'S VIOLENCE-BESET CAPITAL CITY

***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 PCT CHG	TEN LOW RATE	2023		2022-23 PCT CHG
	#	RATE			#	RATE	
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 PCT CHG	TEN LOW RATE	2023		2022-23 PCT CHG
	#	RATE			#	RATE	
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

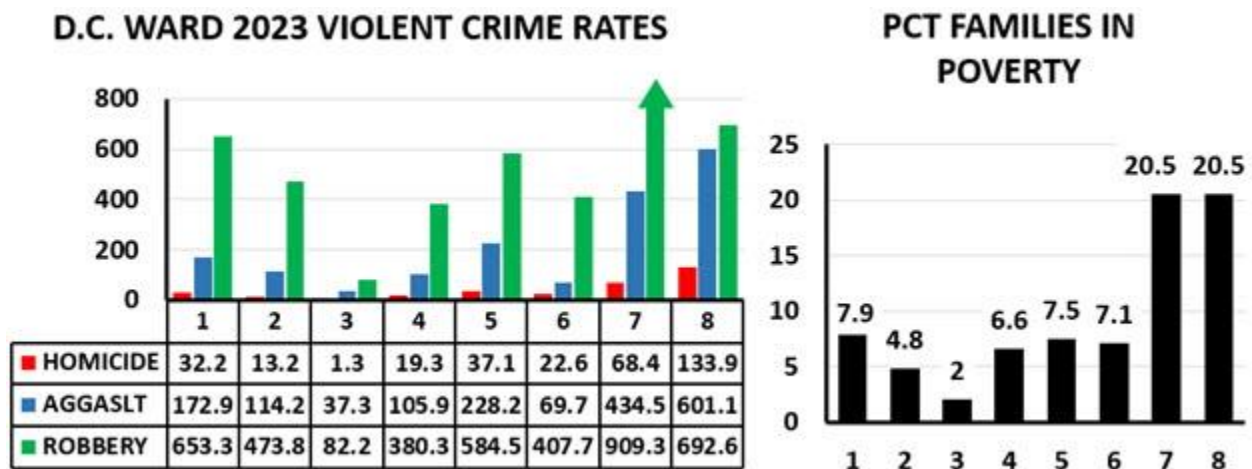
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As of September 30, 2023, Washington D.C. was “only” seventh worst murder-wise. Note that its rate increased thirty-seven percent in 2023, the most recorded by any of its counterparts. Ditto its astounding 67.5 percent leap in robbery, which helped 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.)

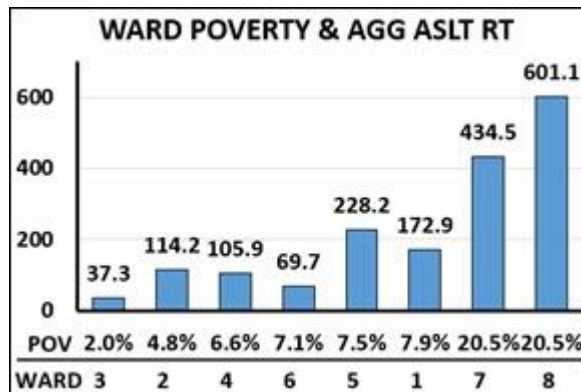
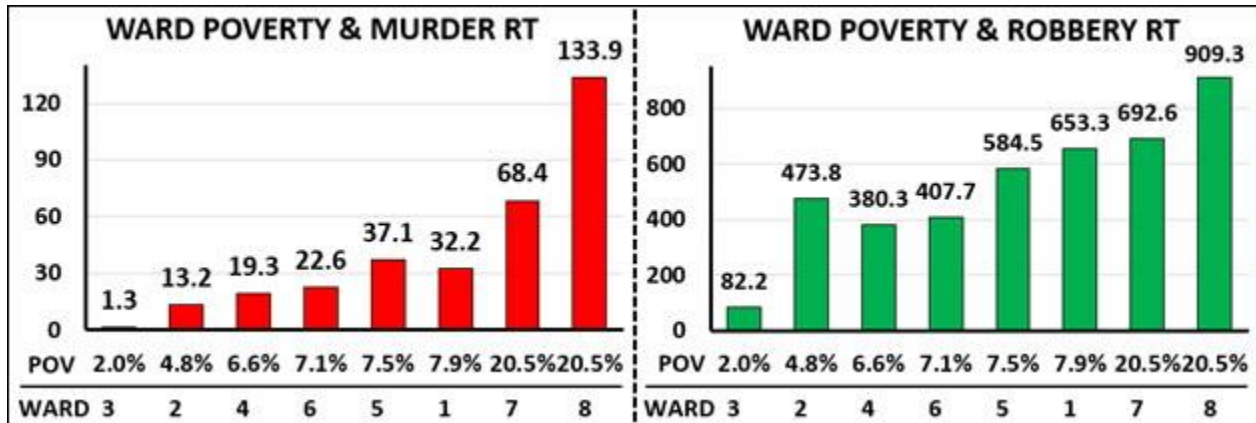
Police Issues is far less concerned with aggregate crime rates than with what’s happening in the neighborhoods where people actually live. As our [Neighborhoods essays](#) frequently point out – most recently, in “[See No Evil – Hear no Evil – Speak no Evil](#)” – economically-challenged places have 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?

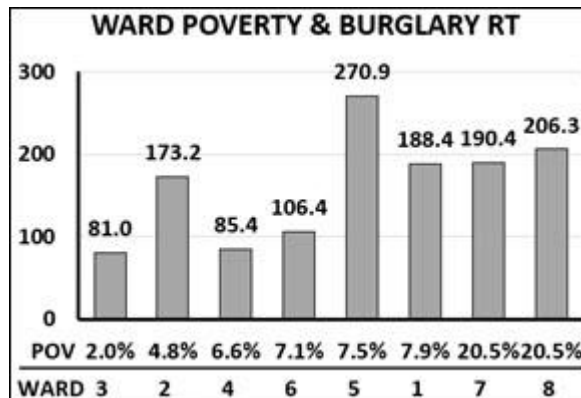
We downloaded [2023 crime data](#) from Open Data DC. Our graph and table on the left report full-year rates/100,000 pop. for Homicide, Robbery and Aggravated Assault. And the graph on the right displays [2022 poverty percentages](#) for each of the District’s eight Wards:



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:



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!](#)":

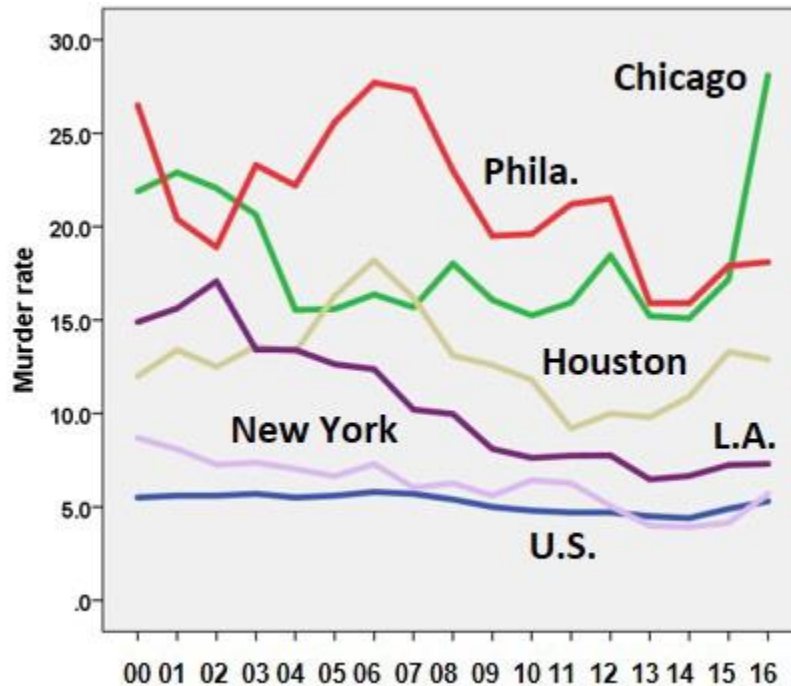
Preventing violence is a task for society. As we've repeatedly pitched, a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities, language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing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

Posted 1/15/18

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU BRAG ABOUT (PART I)

Is the Big Apple's extended crime drop all it seems to be?



By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Remember the “Great Crime Drop” of the nineties? [Observers trace its origin](#) to the end of a decade-long crack epidemic that burdened America’s poverty-stricken inner cities with unprecedented levels of violence. Once the crack wars subsided the gunplay and body count eased. But the news didn’t remain positive everywhere. In “[Location, Location, Location](#)” we identified a number of less-prosperous burghs (e.g., Chicago, St. Louis, Baltimore, Detroit, Newark, Cleveland and Oakland) that have experienced recent increases in violence. [Murder in Chicago](#), for example, soared from 422 to 771 between 2013-2016 (it backed off a bit last year, but only to 650.)

In some lucky places, though, the crime drop continued. Few have crowed about it as much as [New York City](#), which happily reports that its streets keep getting safer even as [lawsuits and Federal intervention](#) have forced cops to curtail the use of aggressive crime-fighting strategies such as stop-and-frisk.

Indeed, [New York City’s numbers](#) look very good. As the above graph shows, its 2016 murder rate of 5.7 per 100,000 pop. was the lowest of America’s five largest cities and

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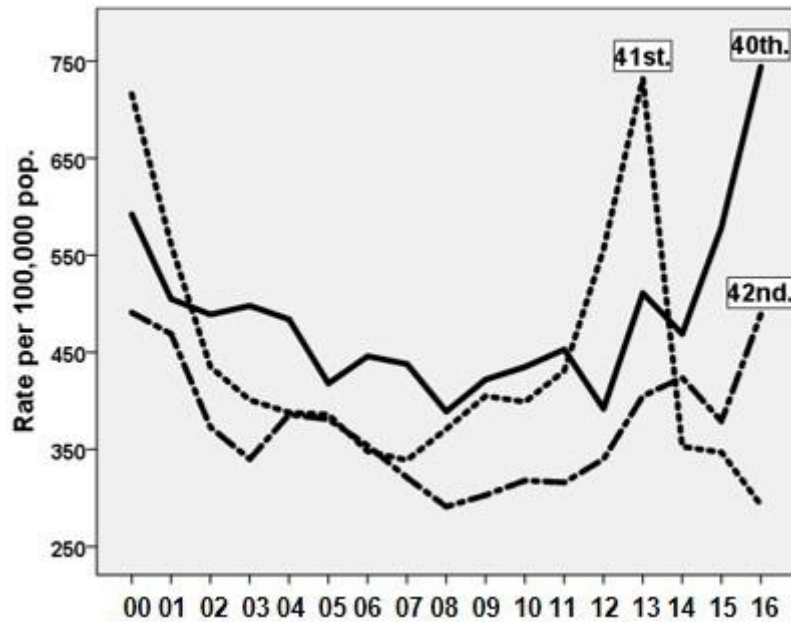
just a tick above the U.S. composite rate of 5.3. (Los Angeles was in second place at 7.3. Then came Houston, at 12.9 and Philadelphia, at 18.1. Chicago, with a deplorable 765 murders, brought up the end at 28.1.) Even better, it's not only killings that are down in the Big Apple: *every* major crime category has been on a downtrend, reaching [levels substantially lower](#) – some far lower – than at the turn of the century:

MAJOR CRIME IN NEW YORK CITY	2000	rate/ 100K	2016	rate/ 100K	% Chg
MURDER & NON- NEGL. MANSLAUGH.	673	8.4	335	3.9	-53
RAPE	2068	25.8	1438	16.8	-35
ROBBERY	32562	406.6	15500	181.5	-55
FELONY ASSAULT	25924	323.7	20847	244.2	-25
BURGLARY	38352	478.9	12990	152.1	-68
GRAND LARCENY	49631	619.7	44279	518.6	-16
GRAND LARCENY MOTOR VEH.	35442	442.6	6327	74.1	-83
TOTAL SEVEN	184652	2305.8	101716	1191.4	-48

Year 2016 precinct crime rates were computed using population estimates on the NYPD precinct map. Year 2000 crime rates were computed by adjusting for estimated population changes in each Borough. For population data sources click [here](#) and [here](#).

What's responsible for the persistent progress? New York City's freshly-reelected Mayor and his police commissioner [credit innovative law enforcement strategies and improved community relations](#). But in a recent interview, Franklin Zimring, [whose 2011 book](#) "The City That Became Safe" praised NYPD for reducing crime, called the reasons for its continued decline "utterly mysterious."

Causes aside, when it comes to measuring crime, complications abound. Even "winners" may not be all that they seem. As we discussed in "[Cooking the Books](#)" and "[Liars Figure](#)," lots of agencies – yes, including NYPD – managed to look good, or better than they should, by creating crime drops with tricks such as downgrading aggravated assaults (which appear in yearly FBI statistics) to simple assaults (which don't). That problem has apparently not gone away.



This graph uses the [NYPD's own data](#) to display 2000-2016 felony assault trends in three highly crime-impacted precincts, the 40th., 41st. and 42nd., all in the Bronx. Just look at that pronounced “U” curve. Soon after cops outed NYPD for fudging stat’s ([that happened in 2010](#)) each precinct’s trends reversed. But the 41st.’s return to presumably more accurate reporting was only brief. Between 2013 and 2014 felony assaults in “[Fort Apache](#)” plunged from 732 to 353, an inexplicable one-year drop of fifty-two percent. And the good news kept coming, with 347 felony assaults in 2015, 293 in 2016 and a measly [265 in 2017](#).

There is plenty of reason to be wary of NYPD’s numbers. Still, assuming that the 41st.’s recent shenanigans are unusual – we couldn’t find another example nearly as extreme – the city’s post-2000 gains against crime seem compelling. But assuming that they’re (mostly) true, how have they been distributed? Has every citizen of the Big Apple been a winner? Let the quest begin!

NYPD has seventy-six precincts. Our main data source was [NYPD’s 2000-2016 online crime report](#). (We excluded precincts #14, Times Square and #22, Central Park, for methodological reasons, and #41 because its recent numbers seem untrustworthy.) We also coded each precinct for its official poverty rate by overlaying the [city’s 2011-2015 poverty map](#) on [NYPD’s precinct map](#). (For how NYC measures poverty click [here](#).)

We’ll start with the total major crime category, which combines the seven major offenses. Its 2016 rate per 100,000 pop. ranged from 3.1 (123rd. pct.) to 45.6 (18th. pct., Broadway/show district.) Comparing the means for total major crime of the ten lowest-rate districts (6.25) with the means of the ten highest-rate districts (24.13) yields a

statistically significant difference ($t=-7.36$, sig .000). So these groups' total major crime levels *are* different. But their proportion of residents living in poverty is not substantially dissimilar. Actually, the raw results were opposite to what one might expect: the mean poverty rate was *higher* in the low major crime than the high major crime precincts (19.3 & 15.9, difference statistically non-significant.)

Similar results were obtained when comparing the 2000-2016 change in the major crime rate of the ten most improved precincts (mean reduction, 62.05%) with the ten least improved precincts (mean reduction, 14.69%). While the magnitude of these groups' crime decline *was* significantly different ($t=14.37$, sig .000), the difference between the proportion of their residents who lived in poverty was slight and statistically non-significant (poverty mean for most improved, 19.28 pct.; for least improved, 21.31 pct.)

We then (by this point, somewhat unsteadily) ran the numbers the other way, comparing total major crime and its improvement over time between the ten high and ten low poverty precincts. Our central finding didn't change: poverty wasn't a significant factor. With all seventy-three precincts in the mix we also tested for relationships between total major crime rate and poverty, and between 2000-2016 changes in the major crime rate and poverty, using the r coefficient. Again, neither total major crime nor its change over time seemed significantly related to poverty.

So poverty doesn't matter? New Yorkers are equally likely to benefit from the crime drop – or not – regardless of their place on the pecking order? As it turns out, not exactly. But that's enough for now. We'll deliver “the rest of the story” in Part II!

Posted 1/25/18

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU BRAG ABOUT (PART II)

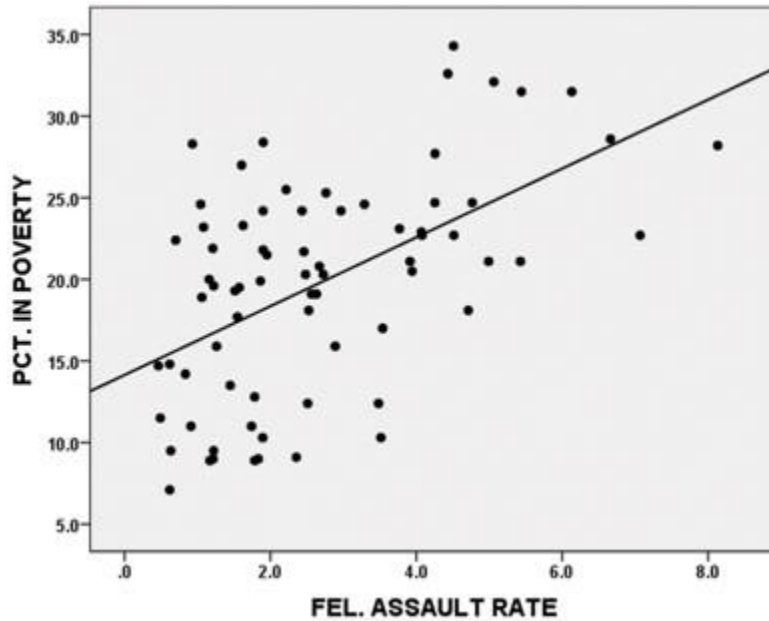
Citywide crime statistics are ripe for misuse

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Part I ended on a perhaps surprising note. Poverty and crime may be deeply interconnected, but our analysis of New York City crime data revealed that neither the city's 2016 total major crime rate nor its change since 2000 were significantly related to the proportion of residents living in poverty.

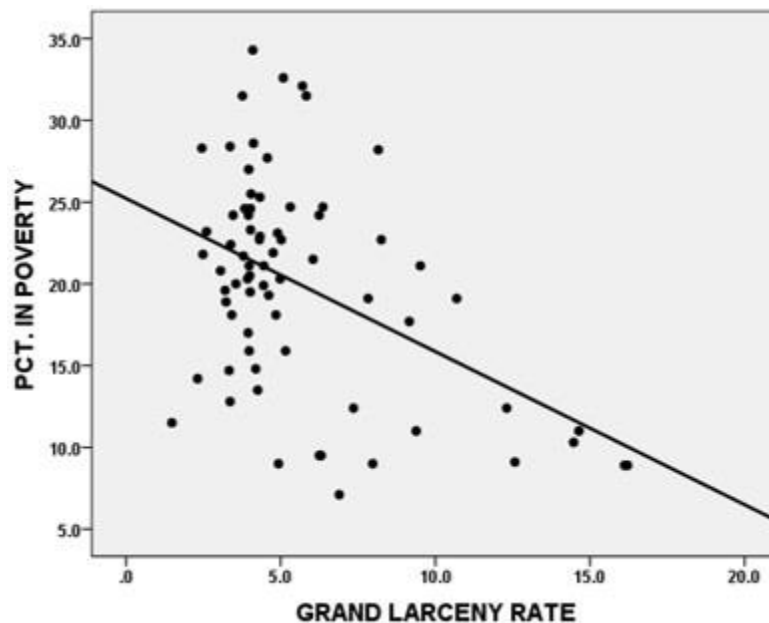
NYPD [tracks seven categories](#) of major crime: murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, grand larceny, and grand larceny of motor vehicle. Their sum yields an eight measure, "total major crime." (See table in Part I, below. NYPD reports yearly frequencies and percentage changes. Instead of raw numbers we used population data to generate rates per 100,000 residents.)

When total major crime didn't yield the anticipated results we turned to one of its components, felony assault. Its 2016 rate per 100,000 pop. ranged from 0.5 (112th. and 123rd. precincts) to 8.1 (40th. pct.) (Precincts 14, 22 and 41 were excluded from analysis. See Part I). As expected, the mean rates of the ten lowest-felony assault rate districts (0.7) and the ten highest-rate districts (5.8) were significantly different ($t=-4.9$, $p < .001$). They also differed markedly as to poverty. That difference was in the expected direction: persons living in poverty comprise 15.8 percent of the population in low felony assault districts and 26 percent in the high rate districts ($t=-3.7$, $p < .002$, statistically significant).

Correlation analysis was used to test the aggregate relationship between felony assault and poverty for all 73 precincts in this study. That revealed a statistically significant relationship in the "positive" direction, meaning that poverty and felony assault increased and decreased in unison ($r=.54$, $p < .000$). Here's the graph (each precinct is a dot):

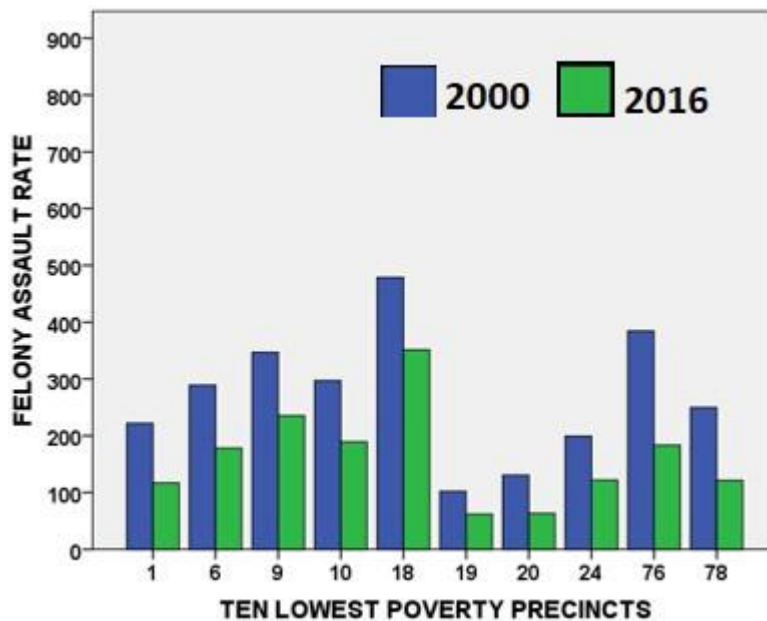


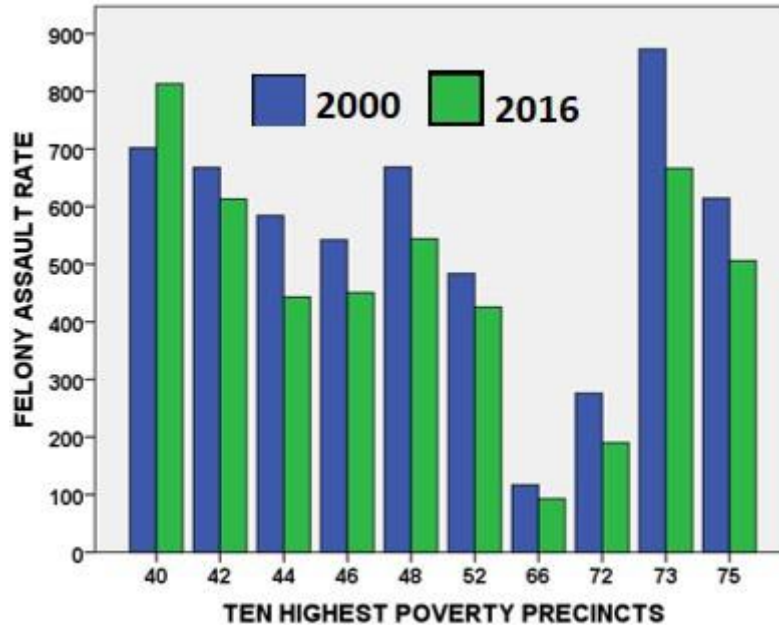
Statistically significant findings were also produced when we tested the relationships between poverty and the remaining violent crimes: robbery ($r=.53, p < .000$), rape ($r=.46, p < .000$) and murder ($r=.48, p < .000$). Poverty and all forms of violent crime went up and down together. There was also a significant positive relationship, of slightly lesser magnitude, between poverty and grand larceny of a motor vehicle ($r=.31, p < .007$; see comment below). In contrast, ordinary grand larceny (not of a vehicle) had a “negative” relationship with poverty: as one increased, the other decreased ($r=-.43, p < .000$, statistically significant). Here’s that graph:



We concluded that this was the reason why there was no observable relationship between total major crime and poverty. In New York, larceny of the “grand” kind [requires a loss exceeding \\$1,000](#). These are presumably more common in affluent areas. As by far the most common form of serious crime, grand larceny’s strong negative relationship with poverty apparently countered the influence of the other factors. (Incidentally, the positive relationship between grand theft of a motor vehicle and poverty is likely caused by the fact that in New York, the theft of any vehicle valued at \$100 or more – that’s *two* zeroes – is “grand.”)

Clearly, aggregate measures such as total major crime should be used with great caution. Fine. So, just how *were* the benefits of New York City’s crime drop distributed? Let’s compare crime rates for the ten poorest and ten most well-off precincts at two points in time: 2000 and 2016. (Precincts #14 and #22 were excluded for methodological reasons, and #41 for trustworthiness. See Part I.) We’ll begin with felony assault:

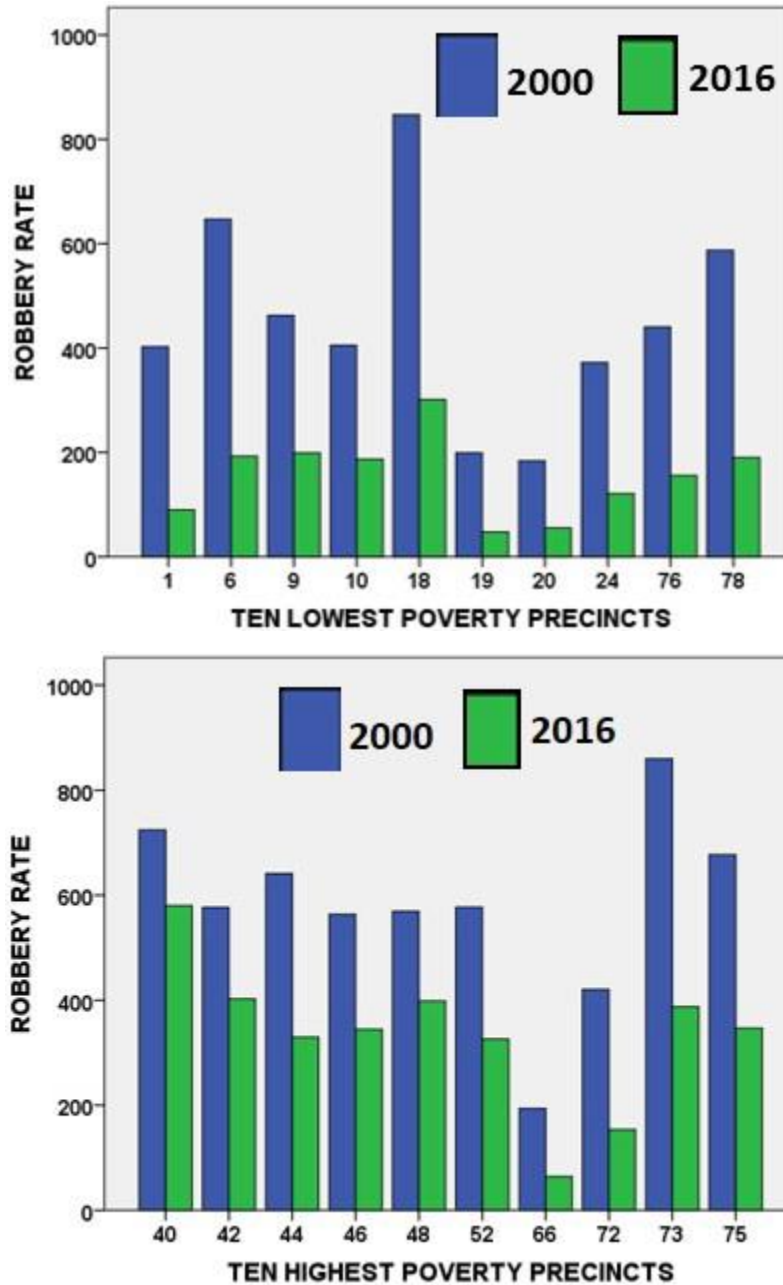




These graphs dramatically depict income's differential effects. In 2016 the mean felony assault rate in the high-poverty precincts was nearly *three times* that of their well-off counterparts (474.5 v. 162.4, $t=4.3$, $p < .001$, a statistically significant difference.) Note that in both sets of precincts, scores clustered in observable groups. Felony assault rates in all but one of the low-poverty precincts topped out at 235.5. Add nearly *two-hundred* points to that and you'll reach the *lowest* score (425.7) in a group of eight high-poverty precincts.

Poverty-stricken precincts had more lousy news. Excluding the besieged 40th., where the felony assault rate *increased* 15.8 percent between 2000-2016, its group's mean decrease of 19.2 percent was *less than half* the 41.4 percent decrease enjoyed by the low-poverty group. That old saw about "the rich getting richer" seems to apply to felony assaults in the Big Apple.

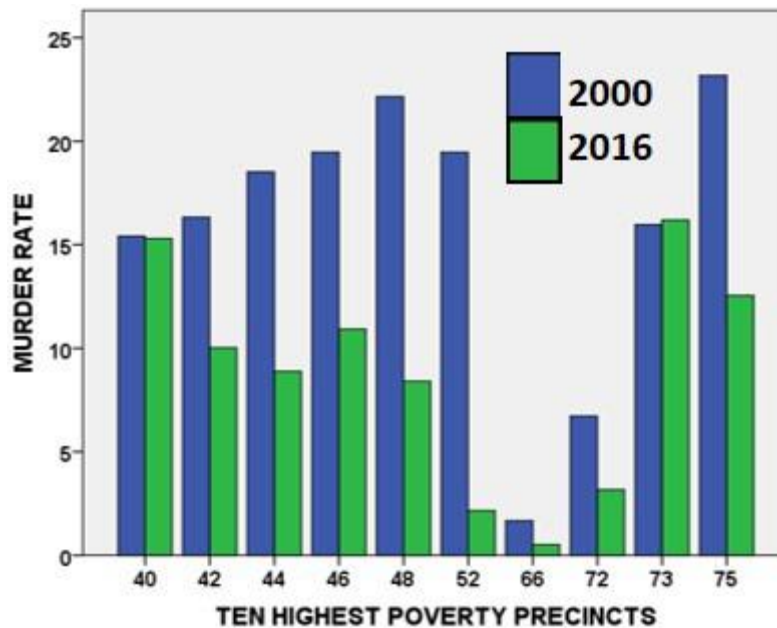
Let's look at the graphs for robbery:



In 2016 the mean robbery rate of the high-poverty precincts was slightly more than *twice* that of their low-poverty counterparts (333.4 v. 154.1, $t=3.5$, $p < .003$, difference statistically significant.) Except for the 18th. (rate=301.5) low-poverty precincts clustered at the lower end of the scale, topping out with the 9th.'s 198.8. One-hundred points later we encounter the trailing edge of a loose group of eight high-poverty precincts, with rates ranging from the 52nd.'s 325.9 to the 40th.'s skyscraper-worthy 580.3.

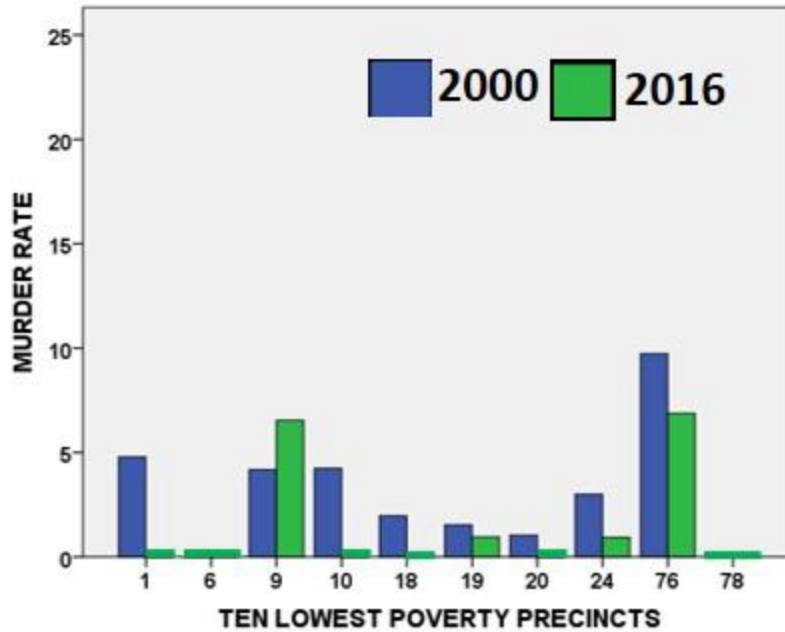
Between 2000-2016 robbery rates declined 66.9 percent overall in low-poverty precincts and 44.5 percent in the high-poverty group. While both trends seem substantial, so was their difference ($t=-4.2$, $p < .001$, statistically significant). Rates were also distinctly dispersed: narrowly within low poverty (range 53.8 to 77.6 percent) and broadly within high poverty (19.9 to 66.8 percent.) Why this difference between differences we don't know, but such volatility inevitably reminds us of tendencies at NYPD and elsewhere to fudge the numbers (see Part I).

And then we arrive at murder. This time we'll begin with the high-poverty precincts:



Let's skip rates and talk actual counts. In 2016 the range for the high-poverty group was from one murder in the 66th. to twenty-three in the 75th. These two precincts also had the extreme scores in 2000, when there were three killings in the 66th. and *forty* in the 75th. By 2016 murder receded in all high-poverty precincts but two, the 40th. and 73rd. In both killings ticked up a bit, going from thirteen to fourteen. Murders otherwise fell, most markedly in the 44th. (25-13), the 46th. (23-14), and especially, the 52nd., which plunged from twenty-five in 2000 to only three in 2016. (However, this precinct had twelve murders each in 2013 and 2015, so its numbers are volatile.)

We won't sweat the details: for lots (but not all) poor New Yorkers, the murder news seems at least somewhat favorable. Now consider the horrors the wealthier set faced:



Six of the ten low-poverty precincts had zero murders (thus, zero rates) in 2016. Scores for the other four ranged from one killing in the 24th. to five in the 9th. Only two precincts, the 6th. and 78th., scored zero murders in 2000. Others ranged from one killing in the 18th. to four in the 76th. (note that a relatively low population of 43,643 lends its rate an inflated appearance.) Murders during the 2000-2016 period increased in only one low poverty precinct, the 9th., which went from three to four.

Glancing at the charts, does it seem that the rich get to ride up front, crime-wise, while the poor are consigned to the caboose? If so, that's hardly unique to Gotham. Consider Los Angeles. In "[Location, Location, Location](#)" we mused about our hometown. Between 2002-2015 murders fell from 656 (rate=17.3 per 100,000) to 279 (rate=7.3), a stunning drop of *fifty-seven percent*. Now consider two of the dozens of communities that comprise the "City of Angels": poverty-stricken Florence, pop. 49001, and upscale Westwood, pop. 51485. During 2002-2015 murder in Florence dropped from an appalling *twenty-five* killings (rate=51.0/100,000) to a merely deplorable eighteen (rate=36.7). Kind of like...New York City's 44th.! Meanwhile murder in Westwood went up: from zero in 2002 to (yawn) one in 2015, a rate of 1.9. And that resembles...NYC's 24th!

Back to New York. Our chart in Part I indicates that between 2000-2016 murders in Gotham fell from 673 (rate 8.4/100,000 pop.) to 335 (rate 3.9.) But let's look *within*. In both the downtrodden 40th. (2016 pop. 79,762, poverty 28.2 percent) and the equally challenged 73rd. (pop. 86,468, poverty 28.6 pct.) killings ticked up from twelve to thirteen, yielding rates of 15.3 and 16.2, *four times* the citywide rate. Meanwhile, in the

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affluent 18th. (pop. 54,066, poverty 10.3 pct.), murders declined from one to zero (rate of zero) while in the large and fabulously rich 19th. (pop. 208,259, poverty 7.1 pct.) they fell from three to two, generating a rate of, um, *one*.

That's our "point." New Yorks' [citywide poverty rate is 19.9 percent](#). As long as it has a sufficient proportion of well-off residents, it can use summary statistics to brag about "great crime drops" until the cows come home. Except that unlike citywide numbers, people aren't composites. Can we assume that residents of the 40th. and 73rd. precincts feel – or truly are – as well served as those who live in the more fortunate 18th. and 19th.? What do poorer citizens think when they hear [Mayor de Blasio boast](#) that his administration has turned crime around? Are they as reassured about things as their wealthier cousins?

As we suggested in "Location," it really *is* about neighborhoods. Aggregating seventy-six precincts because they're located within a single political boundary, then acting as though the total truly reflects the sum of its parts, is intrinsically deceptive. Actually, when it comes to measuring crime and figuring out what to do about it, the 40th., the 73rd. and a host of other New York City precincts really aren't in the Big Apple. They're a part of that other America – you know, the one where the inhabitants of L.A.'s beleaguered Florence district also reside.

Posted 9/1/20

BLACK ON BLACK

Are Black citizens better off with Black cops?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. What first drew our attention to Jackson was [an article in the New York Times](#) about the indictment of three cops for the fatal beating of a 62-year old Black man. And the story became even more compelling when we noticed that each of the accused was Black. As it turns out, so are most of Jackson's cops, including the Chief and his entire command staff.

It began on a Sunday morning, January 13, 2019. That's when passers-by [discovered the body](#) of Anthony Longino, a 62-year old Black pastor, on the steps of his modest church (photo above). He had been shot dead. A few hours later, three officers trolling for his killers spotted 62-year old George Robinson [apparently dealing drugs](#) from his car. Their [official report](#) indicates that an unidentified woman slipped Robinson cash through the window and "scurried" away. They approached and ordered Robinson out. He didn't promptly comply, so they dragged him out. According to [the indictment](#) the force used was clearly excessive, as it included "body slamming George Robinson head first into the roadway pavement as well as striking and kicking George Robinson multiple times in the head and chest."

Robinson, who was recovering from a stroke, collapsed and [police summoned an ambulance](#). Attendants declared Mr. Robinson O.K. After supposedly finding "a large amount of US currency" in the vehicle but no drugs officers cited him for "failure to obey and resisting arrest" and let him go. Robinson returned to a motel room where he had been staying and apparently had several visitors. But within a few hours he was back in the hospital with a brain bleed. He died two days later.

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Officers soon arrested a 22-year old man for the pastor's murder. He confessed, and within a few weeks some good old-fashioned police work led to the arrest of three accomplices, two nineteen and one twenty-three. Within a few weeks an internal investigation by Jackson P.D. and the city's civil service commission (and, supposedly, a review by the FBI) cleared the cops of wrongdoing. One remained on the job at Jackson PD while the two others transferred to the nearby Clinton Police Department. But on August 4, nearly eight months after the incident, as allegations of police abuse beset the U.S., the local D.A. charged the three cops with second-degree murder. Mr. Robinson's family also filed a lawsuit. It alleges that the officers had no reason to act as they did, as "at no time during this event was Mr. Robinson threatening harm to himself or anyone else."

Policing is an inherently messy enterprise with uncertain outcomes. Officer skills vary, and when we throw in the vagaries of cop and citizen temperament and the difficulties of gaining compliance some tragic endings are assured. Still, if Mr. Robinson *was* a criminal, he seems at worst a small-time drug dealer, and the grossly disproportionate outcome left this (thankfully, retired) practitioner's head shaking.

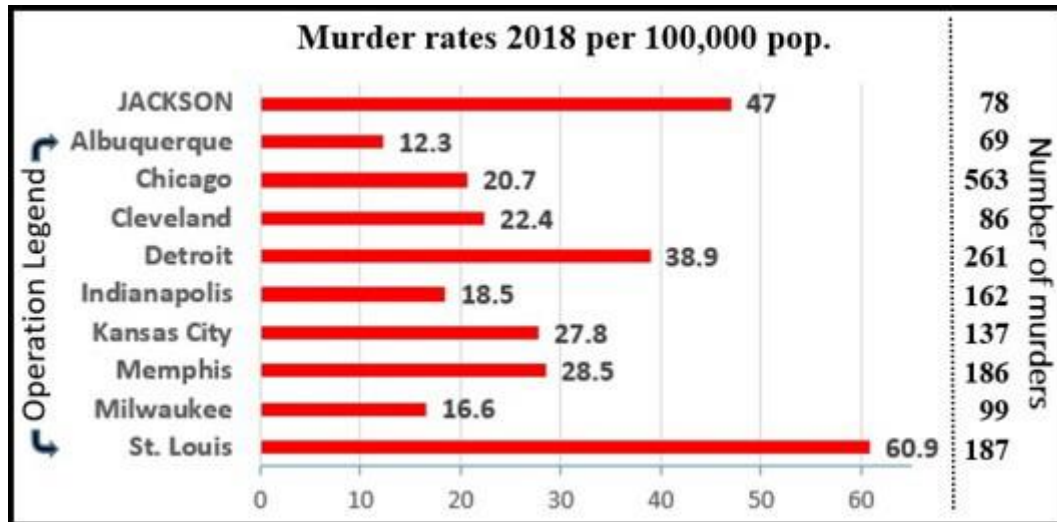
Mr. Robinson was apparently shuttling between a home in the the neighborhood where the encounter took place and a motel room where his girlfriend lived. Other than his being older and frail, we discovered little else of significance. As for the Jackson officers, the *Free Press* (hint: it's not a fan of the police) and other sources reported that the cops were part of a K-9 team that was looking for the pastor's killers. Two were involved in nonfatal shootings in 2017 and 2018 but had been exonerated of wrongdoing. Meanwhile officials in both Jackson and Clinton are steadfastly standing by their servants. "We don't want anything to do with a bad cop and if I thought these guys were bad cops, we wouldn't have hired them," said Clinton's police chief. Its mayor went so far as to suggest that the indictment might have come about because of a sweetheart deal between the Robinson family attorney and the D.A.

What's beyond a doubt is that Jackson is a *very* violent place. Last December, after "nearly two dozen" residents were shot in a single week, a desperate police sergeant lamented that "gun violence is just awful":

Sometimes it is just a way of life...it is definitely something important we need to work on...It is just horrible that people have to live with that...we have to take the steps to change this dramatically!... We certainty need to study this in depth and come up with some decent plans to combat it.

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By any measure, the city's body count is [truly astounding](#). This graph compares Jackson's 2018 murder rates with the nine crime-struck cities participating in DOJ's freshly-hatched "[Operation Legend](#)."



Mr. Robinson's encounter with police, and the pastor's murder that preceded it, took place in a particularly downtrodden neighborhood known as "[The Washington Addition](#)." Located within the 2nd police precinct, [its median household income](#) of \$16,500 is one-quarter the national median (\$60,293.) Jackson as a whole fares little better. At \$37,563, its median household income is only three-fifths of the national median. In fact, nearly twenty-seven percent of Jackson's residents live in poverty, [more than twice the U.S. figure](#) (11.8 percent.)

Jackson Police Precinct	1	2	3	4
*Population (thousands)	70	64	47	45
Murders 2018				
All victims (Black victims)	16 (14)	21 (21)	30 (28)	9 (8)
Mur. rate 2018 /100K pop.	23	33	64	20
Murders 2019				
All victims (Black victims)	22 (13)	23 (22)	25 (22)	8 (6)
Mur. rate 2019 /100K pop.	31	36	53	18
Dominant ZIP (39-)	212	209	213	211
ZIP med. HH inc. (thous)	38	26	23	56
ZIP pct. Black	83	91	98	38
* J.P.D. estimates. 1 st & 2 nd pcts. likely high.				

Full stop. Posts in our blog's "[Neighborhoods](#)" section frequently remark about the relationship between income, race and crime. (See, most recently, our essay about [Portland and Minneapolis](#)). Might these factors also play a role in Jackson? We gathered precinct murder data using [WLBT's homicide tracker](#). Counting the "dots" on its precinct maps yields 76 murders in 2018 (the [UCR](#) reported 78) and 78 in 2019.

[According to the Census](#), eighty-two percent of Jackson's 160,628 residents are Black. Based on the dominant ZIP's, it seems that most Blacks reside in the impoverished 1st, 2nd and 3rd precincts. Most Whites live in the comparatively prosperous 4th precinct, [whose dominant ZIP](#) boasts a median HHI of about \$56,453, only slightly lower than U.S. overall.

Grab a look at the table. Compare murder frequencies and rates between precincts. And within precincts, between Blacks and non-Blacks. (The contrast would have probably been higher but for J.P.D.'s exaggerated population count for the 1st precinct, and possibly the 2nd.) Quibbles about numbers aside, Jackson's Black majority clearly faces appalling odds. Of course, the cops know that.

We approached this incident as we do all: *tabula rasa*. Still, when your author paused while building fancy tables to consider his own experiences carrying a badge, Mr. Robinson didn't strike him as much of a threat. Jackson's cops, though, work in a very unforgiving environment. When the now-indicted officers happened on someone who seemed to be taking advantage of the city's troubles, their exasperation may have led to an overly aggressive response. One that caused an old man to fall and crack his skull. That's not so dissimilar from what happened to [Mr. Martin Gugino](#), the White septuagenarian "peace activist" whose head smashed the pavement after he was pushed aside by a White cop.

Might Jackson's struggle with crime and violence affect how its officers deal with citizens? Could it sometimes lead to poor decisions? Really, how could it *not*?

Normally this would be the place to offer correctives, but we've got another iron in the fire: Kenosha, where most cops and citizens are White. We'll have more to say about Jackson then. Until then, keep safe!

Posted 5/25/20

BUT IS IT *REALLY* “SATAN”?

A Sheriff's lament reflects the hopelessness of urban decay



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. “Satan has taken over Bogalusa, and it’s time we take it back.” Louisiana Sheriff Randy Seal’s [memorable words](#) came on May 18, two days after more than five-hundred local residents staged an outdoor memorial service in Bogalusa, a distressed city of about 12,000 seventy miles north of New Orleans. According to authorities, citizens assembled at a major intersection (in violation of COVID-19 restrictions) to mourn the passing of a local resident, Dominique James, 29. Suddenly a vehicle drove by, and a barrage of gunfire rang out. Thirteen were struck by bullets, apparently none fatally.

“I am burying my son and I just think it was heartless for someone to come through and just ring out gunshots,” [said his grieving mother](#), Rena Robertson. Her laments carried special resonance, as her son had recently gone missing, and it took an air search to find his vehicle parked deep in the woods. [Dominique’s murdered remains lay inside](#).

Our next stop was the [UCR](#). And the story it told was depressingly familiar. In 2018, the most recent year with full data, Bogalusa, pop. 11,730, reported 124 violent crimes. That yields a miserable per/1,000 rate of 10.6, about twice Louisiana’s 5.4 and close to three times the national 3.7. Looking back, 2018 was actually a pretty good year for the town. Its 2010 rate was 14.5; in 2015, it was 13.3. (p.s. the UCR lists rates per 100,000.)

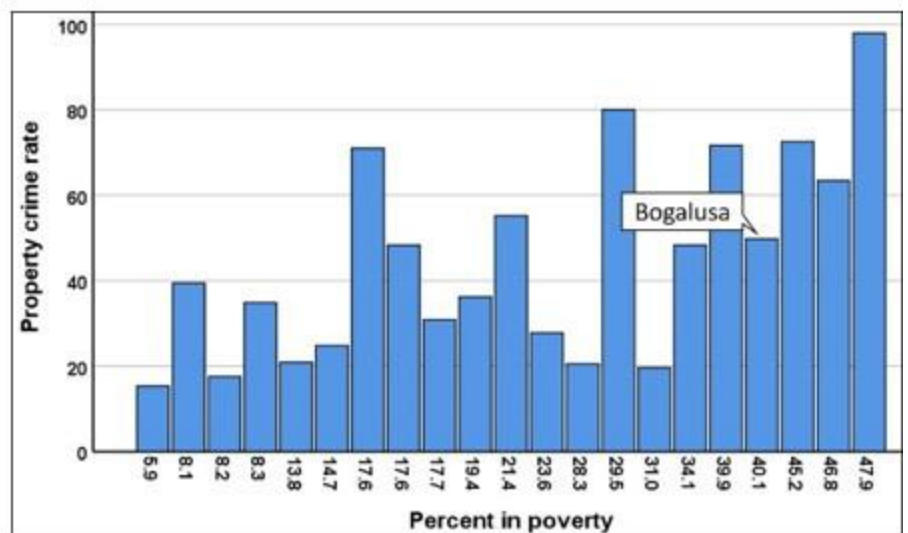
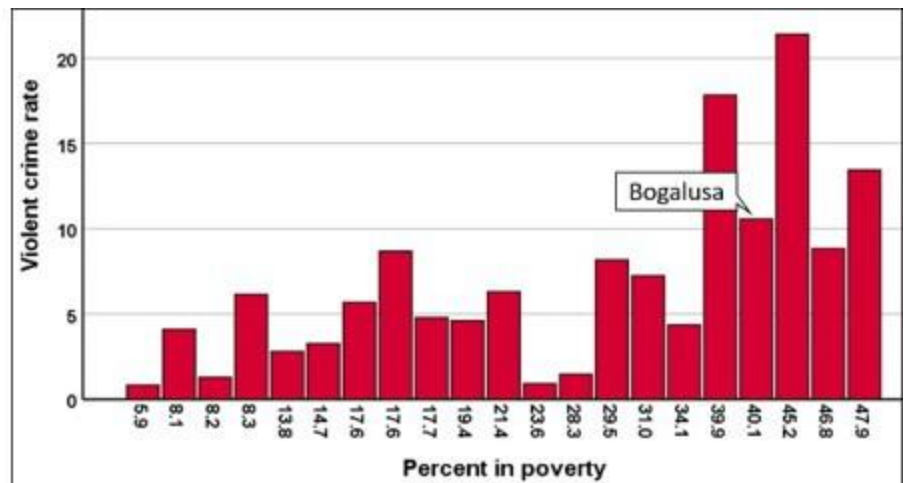
As its readers know, *Police Issues* is very much of the mind that crime and economic conditions are two sides of the same coin. So our very next stop was the [Census](#). No surprise there. In 2018, a depressing 40.1 percent of Bogalusa’s citizens lived in poverty. To compare, it was 11.8 percent for the U.S. and 18.6 percent for Louisiana.

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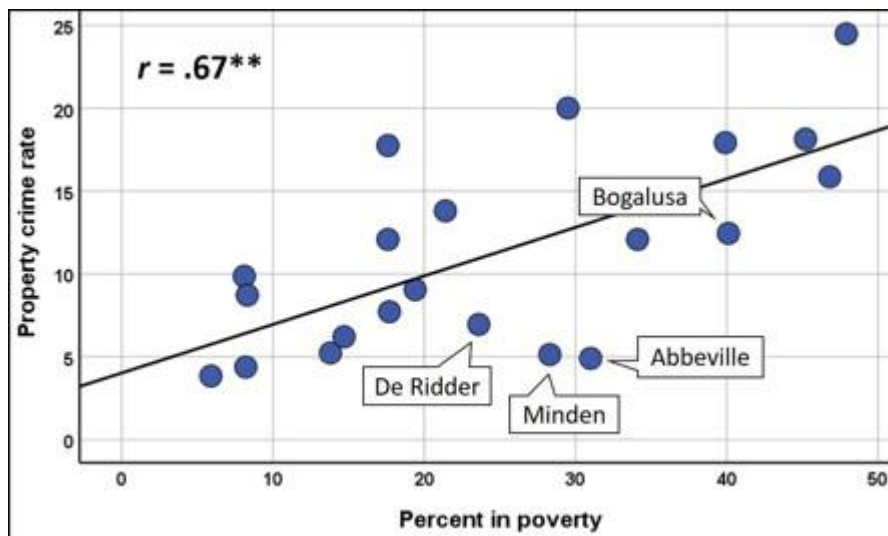
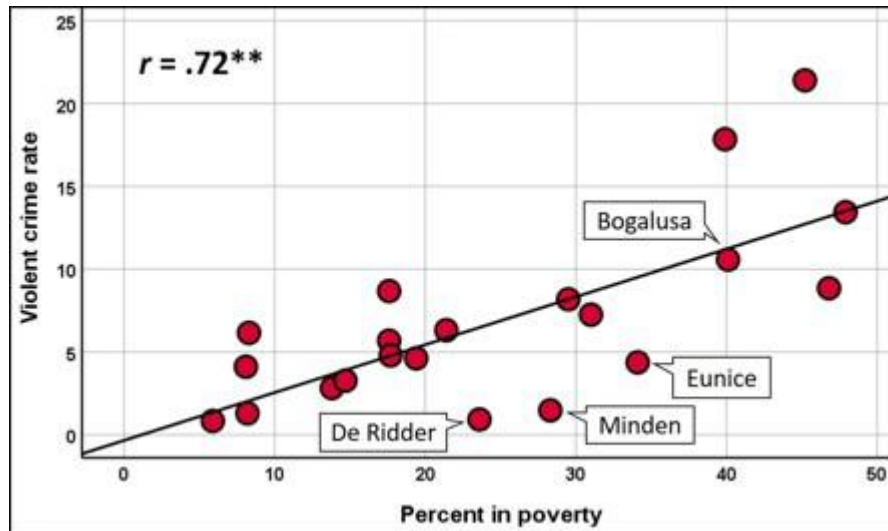
Well, maybe Bogalusa is special. Maybe it's not poverty that underlies its struggle with violence. Perhaps it really is the Devil! (Normally we prefer to look at neighborhoods, whose inhabitants are exposed to similar doses of the influencers that propel crime. That's the thought that underlies our "[Neighborhoods](#)" section. But we lack a ready source of within-city crime and economic data for these burg's, so must stick with their overall statistics.) Including Bogalusa, Louisiana has 21 cities with populations of 10,000-20,000. The graphs below depict, for each, percent of residents in poverty from the 2018 Census, and violent and property crime rates per 1,000 pop. from the 2018 UCR. (Violent crimes include murder, non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crimes include burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.)

Louisiana cities with populations between 10,000-20,000 (n=21)

City	Pop	PovRate
Youngsville	14370	5.9
Broussard	12672	8.1
Mandeville	12371	8.2
Zachary	17884	8.3
Covington	10658	13.8
Baker	13487	14.7
Morgan City	11066	17.6
Gonzales	10916	17.6
Gretna	17965	17.7
Thibodaux	14745	19.4
Pineville	14415	21.4
De Ridder	10820	23.6
Minden	12215	28.3
West Monroe	12594	29.5
Abbeville	12279	31
Eunice	10073	34.1
Crowley	12779	39.9
Bogalusa	11730	40.1
Opelousas	16262	45.2
Natchitoches	17981	46.8
Bastrop	10270	47.9



To be sure, there are plenty of ups and downs. Yet one trend is difficult to miss: as poverty goes up, so does crime. To double-check here are the corresponding “scattergrams”:



With a few exceptions – De Ridder, Minden and Eunice for violent crime, and De Ridder, Minden and Abbeville for property crime – poverty is strongly associated with both types of offending. That relationship is evident by the magnitude of the “*r*” statistics. (It’s on a scale of minus one to plus one. Either extreme denotes a lock-step association; zero, none.) Both coefficients (.72 and .67) demonstrate a strong “positive” relationship, meaning that poverty moves up and down pretty much in sync with violent crime as well as property crime. As for the two asterisks, that means the results are statistically “significant,” with a probability of less than 1/100 that they were produced

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by chance. (For a more thorough discussion of such things check out “[Scapegoat \(Part I\)](#)” and “[Human Renewal](#).”)

Of course, the adequacy of policing can also affect crime. We collected [UCR police employee data](#) for each town. As expected, there was a statistically significant association between population size and the number of sworn officers ($r=.59^*$). But that doesn’t necessarily mean that needs were being met. This table compares the four least violent towns (mean/1,000 rate, 1.1) with the four most violent (mean/1,000 rate, 15.8):

City	Pop	Violent Crimes	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crimes	Property Crime Rate	Poverty rate	Sworn officers	Sworn rate/ 1,000 pop.
Youngsville	14370	12	0.8	221	3.8	5.9	25	1.7
De Ridder	10820	10	0.9	301	7	23.6	25	2.3
Mandeville	12371	16	1.3	217	4.4	8.2	37	3
Minden	12215	18	1.5	251	5.1	28.3	32	2.6
Bogalusa	11730	124	10.6	584	12.4	40.1	35	3
Bastrop	10270	138	13.4	1006	24.5	47.9	32	3.1
Crowley	12779	228	17.8	916	17.9	39.9	36	2.8
Opelousas	16262	348	21.4	1180	18.1	45.2	40	2.5

For all 21 cities, sworn staffing ranged from 1.67 to 5.7 per 1,000 pop. But the differences between these two groups was slight. The least violent places – Youngsville, De Ridder, Mandeville and Minden – averaged 2.4 officers/1,000 citizens, while the high-violence places – Bogalusa, Bastrop, Crowley and Opelousas – averaged 2.85/1,000. (Comparing the top four/bottom four for property crime produces only two differences. De Ridder, the second least-violent city, deteriorates to seventh place, while Bogalusa, which is only three steps from being the most violent, improves a bit to fourteenth.)

Mandeville looks peaceful. Let’s contrast it with two burg’s that seem much less so:

- Bogalusa is close in both population and police staffing. It’s also nearly *five times* poorer and has nearly *eight times* the number of violent crimes.
- Opelousas has nearly four-thousand more residents. But it only has *three* more cops – that is, one per shift. Its poverty rate is also more than *five times* worse. With that we’d expect more violence. But more than *twenty times* as much? Yikes.

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Clearly, Bogalusa and Opelousas (and Bastrop, and Crowley) could use more cops. Only problem is: who'll pay for them? "Why, like other small Louisiana towns, Bogalusa is slowly dying" is the title of a [July 5, 2019 story](#) in the *New Orleans Advocate*. According to the well-written piece, it really is all about economics. "The only thing left here is that mill" said a long-time resident who once worked at the city's remaining industrial plant, a large paper mill. But automation displaced most of its workers, and good jobs remain scarce. A block away, a once-booming retail strip "is now a rundown row of storefronts, many of them abandoned, with papered-over windows."

But something important escapes notice. While the town's poverty load and abysmal finances (Alabama placed it under "fiscal administration") get prominent billing, violence draws absolutely no mention. Indeed, the word "crime" comes up only once, in the context of the gunning down of a black sheriff's deputy by white extremists fifty-five years earlier. Yet as its inhabitants well know, armed violence is no stranger to Bogalusa. Less than a year has passed since that [infamous two-week period](#) in July 2019 when the community experienced eleven shootings and six wounded in fifteen days. Police chief Kendall Bullen (he's still on the job) managed the chaos [with an understaffed force and truculent survivors](#). "A lot of the victims are not cooperating," he said. "They don't want to give us information."

Of course, it takes a lot more than cops to effectively counter crime. Poverty, and the crime-generating factors that go along with poverty, have beset Bogalusa for many years. It may be impolitic to mention, but consider that the memorial service's honoree, 29-year old [Dominique Audrell James](#), is likely one and the same as "[Dominique A. James](#)," a 23-year old Bogalusan who was booked into jail in early 2014 for "distribution of schedule II drugs and criminal conspiracy."

We've long argued that urban violence is best tackled through intensive, geographically focused campaigns of socioeconomic renewal. For example, there's [Jobs-Plus](#), a national program that provides residents of housing developments with everything from job training and placement to rent assistance. Or a local variant, Birmingham's (Ala.) "[Promise Initiative](#)," a city-run program that connects high-school juniors and seniors with apprenticeships so they can learn vital skills. Graduating seniors can also get tuition assistance to attend two and four-year colleges.

Sadly, such things seem absent from the current political debate. Other than preaching, we've actually *mailed* several letters (really, in *envelopes*) to politicians recommending that Presidential campaigns connect with, say, Birmingham's mayor to get better informed about the needs of places like, say, Bogalusa, Bastrop, Crowley and

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Opelousas. How can America's many struggling communities be transformed? Really, whoever our next President turns out to be, getting *that* done should be her "job #1."

Posted 12/3/19

DID THE TIMES SCAPEGOAT L.A.'S FINEST? (PART II)

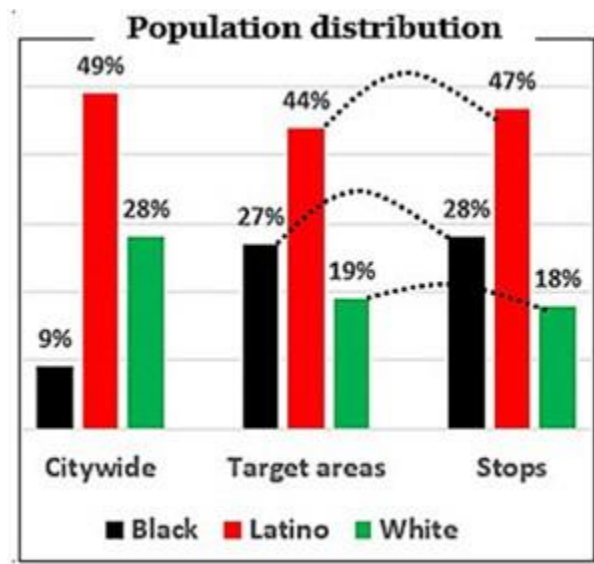
***Quit blaming police racism for lopsided outcomes.
And fix those neighborhoods!***

For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. [Part I](#) challenged the [L.A. Times' apparent conclusion](#) that race and ethnicity drove officer decision-making practices during LAPD's stop-and-frisk campaign. Let's explore who got stopped and who got searched in greater detail.

Who got stopped?

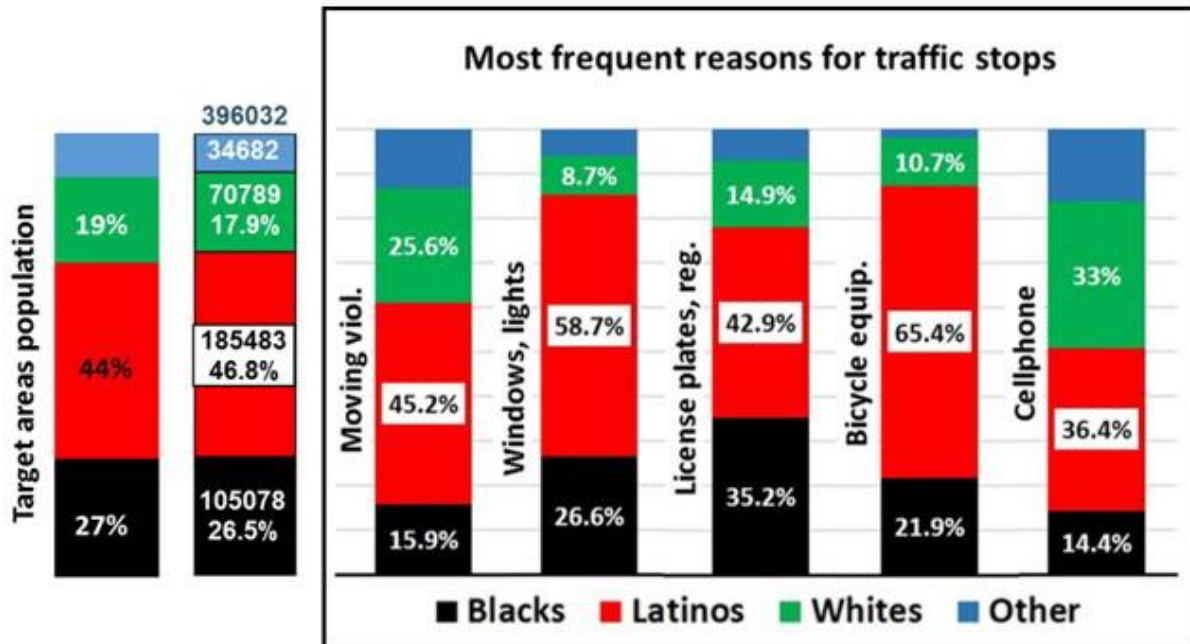
L.A. City is twenty-eight percent white. Yet as the Times noted, only eighteen percent of the 549,488 persons stopped during a ten-month period were white. On the other hand, Blacks, who comprise a mere nine percent of the city's total population, figured in twenty-seven percent of stops. Proof positive of bias, right?

Not so fast. L.A.'s communities are far from integrated. We coded a random sample of stops for location and identified 52 distinct neighborhoods. Armed with demographics, we compared again. Check out those dotted lines. Once location is factored in, the racial/ethnic makeup of those who were stopped closely corresponds with the demographics of the place where they were stopped. That's what one would expect.

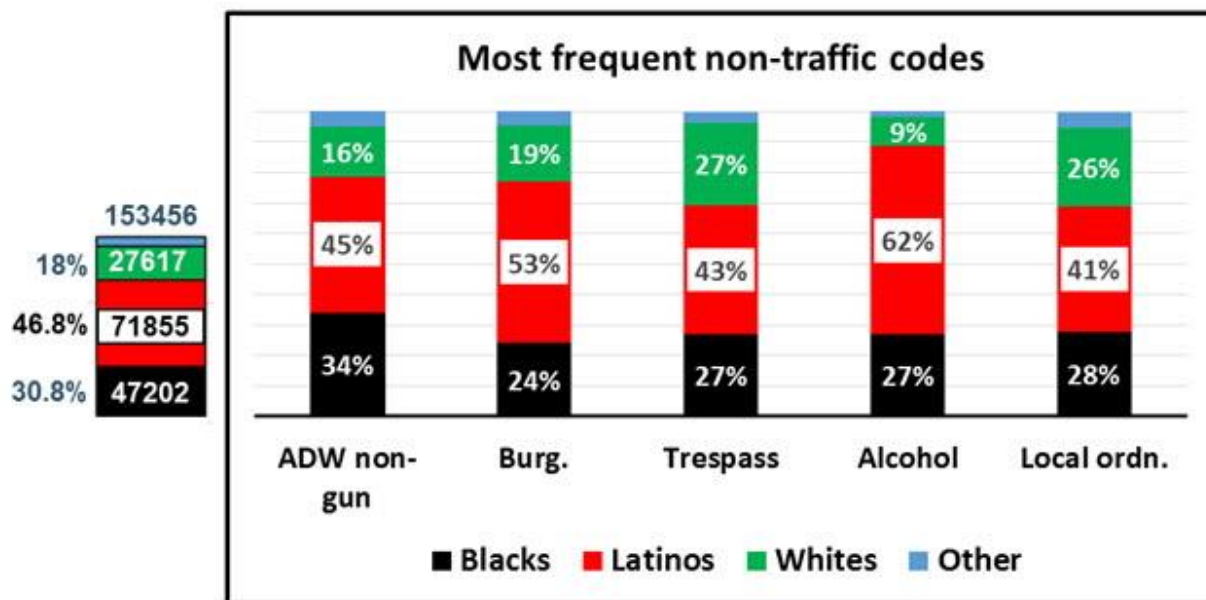


Still, that doesn't prove that bias *didn't* play a role in targeting. For more insight about officer decisionmaking we focused on two data fields pertinent to the "why's" of a stop: "traffic violation CJIS offense code" and "suspicion CJIS offense code." (For a list of these Federally-standardized codes click [here](#).) Seventy-two percent of those stopped (n=396,032) were detained in connection with a traffic violation. Overall, the racial/ethnic distribution of this subset was virtually identical to that of the target area. We collapsed the ten most

frequent violations into five categories. This graphic displays shares for each racial/ethnic group:



Twenty-eight percent of stops (n=153,456) were for non-traffic reasons. Of these, 82 percent (n=126,005) bore a CJIS crime suspicion code. Here are the top five:



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The remaining eighteen percent of non-traffic stops lacked a CJIS suspicion code. That subset was 29.5 percent Black, 48.9 percent Latino and 17.4 percent white, which closely resembles the racial/ethnic distribution of target areas.

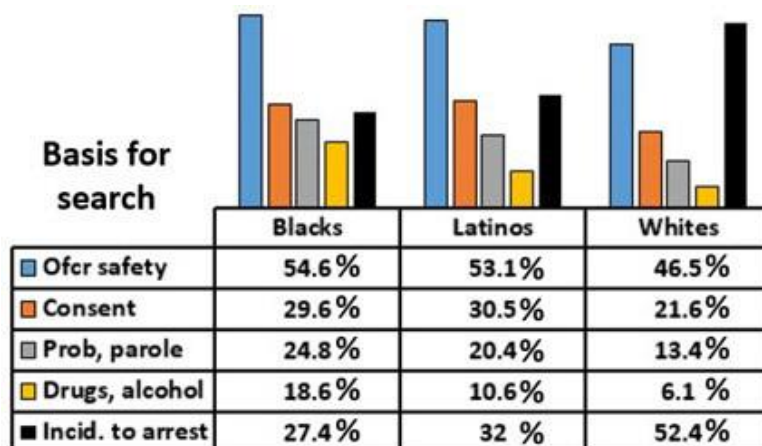
Proportionately, the distribution of stops – traffic and otherwise – roughly corresponded with each racial/ethnic group's share of the population. But there were exceptions. Whites were frequently dinged for moving violations and yakking on cell phones, and Latinos for obstructed windows and inoperative lighting. Most importantly, Blacks had an oversupply of license plate and registration issues, with implications that we'll address later.

Who got searched?



Ninety-seven percent of searches (n=135,733) were of Blacks, Latinos or whites. Justification codes appear in the “basis for search” field. While the CJIS offense and suspicion fields carry a single entry, basis for search is populated with a dizzying variety of comma-delimited combinations (e.g., “1, 4, 5, 12”):

- 1 – Consent search
- 2 & 5 – Officer safety pat-down
- 3 – Presence during a search warrant
- 4 – Subject on probation or parole
- 6 – Drugs, paraphernalia, alcohol
- 7 – Odor of drugs or alcohol
- 8 – Canine detected drugs
- 9 & 10 – Search incident to arrest
- 11 – Miscellaneous
- 12 – Vehicle impound



We collapsed the most frequently-used codes into five categories: officer safety, consent, probation/parole, drugs and alcohol, and incident to arrest (percentages exceed 100 because multiple codes were often used.)

Officer safety was the primary reason cited for

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searching Blacks and Latinos. When it came to whites, incident to arrest took first place. That may be because whites were substantially less likely than Blacks or Latinos to grant consent, have drugs or alcohol in plain view or be under official supervision.

Patterns between groups seemed otherwise consistent, and what differences exist could be attributed to place and economics. Yet a niggling problem persists. Why, as the *Times* complains, were whites searched far less frequently during traffic stops than Blacks or Latinos? After all, when searched, whites had *more* contraband!

Traffic stops

	All groups	Blacks	Latinos	Whites
Search conducted	15.0%	23.3%	16.1%	5.0%
Search & contraband seized	16.7%	17.2%	15.9%	20.1%

Contraband found

	All groups	Blacks	Latinos	Whites
All stops	7.4%	9.1%	8.0%	5.3%
Traffic	3.1%	4.9%	3.2%	1.3%
Non-traffic	18.6%	18.5%	20.2%	15.3%

We'll get to that in a moment. But first we'd like to point out a couple things that the *Times* left out. First, only fifteen percent of traffic stops involved a search. When all traffic

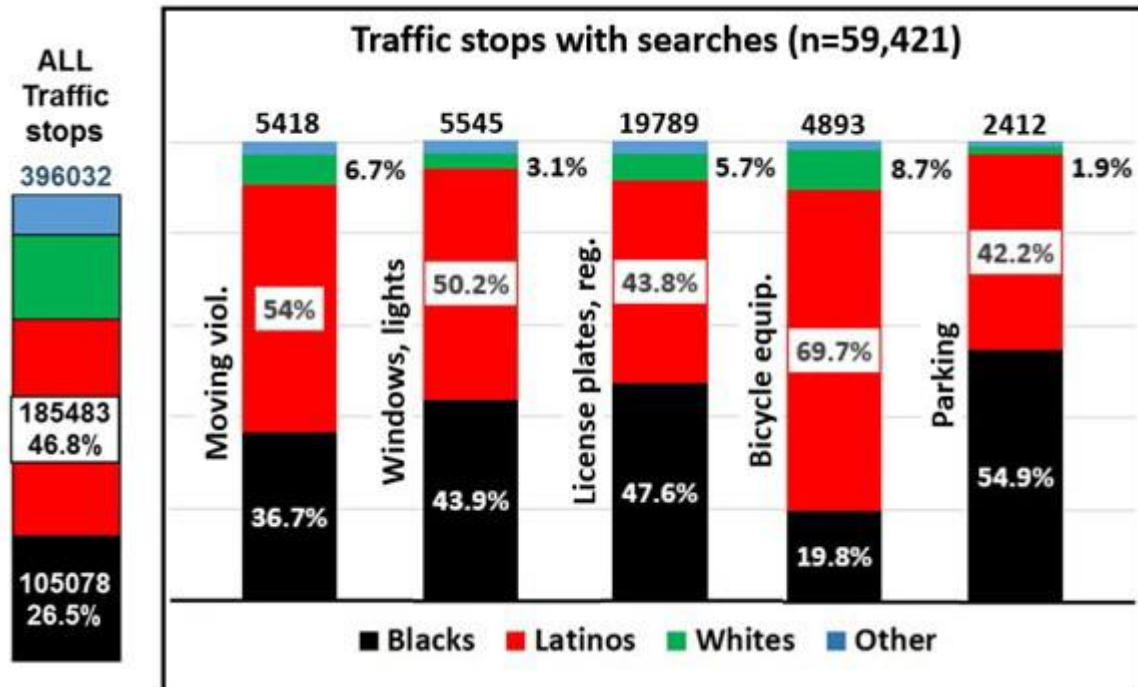
stops are taken into account contraband was seized – much, assumedly in plain view – from 4.9 percent of Blacks, 3.2 percent of Latinos and 1.3 percent of Whites.

Neither did the Times say anything about the kinds of contraband seized. Since LAPD's goal was to tamp down violence, we selected all encounters, traffic or not, where "contraband_type" includes the numeral "2", meaning a firearm. Overall, 3,060 of the 549,488 individuals stopped during the project (0.06 percent) had a gun or were present when a gun was found. Whites were substantially *less* likely than Blacks or Latinos to be found with a gun, and particularly when searched.

Gun recoveries

	Black	%	Latino	%	White	%
Total encountered	152,280		257,338		98,406	
No search, gun found	141	0.09	223	0.09	75	0.08
Search, gun found	1,096	0.72	1,182	0.46	198	0.20
Total with guns	1,237	0.81	1,405	0.55	273	0.28

Back to traffic stops with a search. For this subset the top codes were the same, excepting that parking infractions replaced cellphone misuse. Here are the results:



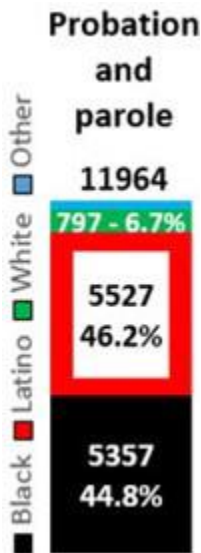
When we examined *all* traffic stops the one disparity that caught the eye was a substantial over-representation of Blacks for license plate and registration violations. As the above graphic illustrates, that's even more so for traffic stops that led to a search. Overall, license plate and registration issues were the most frequent traffic violations linked to a search, appearing in out of every three episodes (19,789/59,421).

What's the takeaway?

First, not all stops are created equal. Non-traffic stops are often precipitated by observations – say, a gangster with bulging pockets – that may “automatically” justify a [“Terry” stop-and-frisk](#). Discerning what's going on inside a vehicle is far trickier. Without something more, ordinary moving violations (e.g., speeding or running a stop sign) and equipment boo-boos (e.g., inoperative tail lights) don't give an excuse to search.

That “more” can be a registration or licensing issue. If a plate has expired or is on the wrong vehicle, or if a vehicle's operator lacks a valid license, officers have an opening to parlay a stop into something more. Indeed, a 2002 California Supreme Court decision ([In re Arturo D.](#)) expressly endorsed intrusive searches for driver license and vehicle registration information. (In time, the enthusiastic response apparently backfired, and just days ago California's justices literally slammed on the brakes. (See [People v. Lopez.](#)) In any event, it often really *is* about money. Registration and licensing issues are tied to

economics, making many Blacks vulnerable to inquisitions while lots of whites get a free pass.



Our analysis of the “basis for search” and “basis for search narrative” fields revealed that at least 11,964 of the 549,488 persons in the dataset were on probation or parole. More than half (6,810, 56.9 percent) were encountered during a traffic stop. It’s not surprising that every last one was searched. Blacks, whose share of persons under supervision ([30 percent of probationers; 38 percent of parolees](#)) is about three times their proportion of the population ([12.3 percent](#)) were, as a group, by far the most exposed.

Policing is a complex enterprise, rife with risk and uncertainty. As with other human services, its practice is unavoidably imprecise. Although we’re reluctant to be too hard on our media friends, this may be a good time to remind the *Times* that trying to “explain” dissimilar outcomes by jumping to the usual conclusion – essentially, that cops are racists – can do a major disservice. As we’ve pointed out in a series of posts (be sure to check out our [“stop and frisk”](#) section), when cops target high-crime areas, the socioeconomics of urban America virtually assure disparate results.

So should police abandon aggressive crime-fighting strategies? That debate has been going on for a very long time. In our view, the *real* fix calls for a lot more than guns and badges. (For the latest, supposedly most “scientific” incarnation of targeted policing check out “Understanding and Responding to Crime and Disorder Hot Spots,” available [here](#).) In our own, very measly opinion what’s *really* needed is a “Marshall Plan” for America’s neighborhoods, so that everyone regardless of ethnicity, skin color or financial resources gets the chance to prosper.

Of course, we all know that. Still, we’re waiting for a candidate to utter that magic word. Psst...once again, it’s “neighborhoods”!

Posted 6/26/20

DON'T "DIVEST" – INVEST!

***Stripping money from the police is foolish.
So is ignoring the plight of poverty-stricken neighborhoods.***

For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. George Floyd's legacy has reached Oregon. After admitting that being white has unfairly worked to his advantage, [Mayor Ted Wheeler pledged](#) to take funds from the police and other city departments and use them to invest in economically disadvantaged areas. He also urged a rethinking of law enforcement's role and warned that some police units would lose funding. Among them is the department's [violence reduction team](#), which has been in operation since 2019. According to one of its operatives, [the squad investigated 426 shootings last year](#). Among these were a number of inter-gang battles involving multiple shooters.

Portland also got [a new chief, Jack Lovell](#). A veteran African-American officer, he pledged to "better align" public and officer views of how policing ought be done. With [thirty-six homicides in 2019](#) and "[an unprecedented wave](#)" of twenty-three shootings during the first ten days of 2020, he clearly faces a tough task. Still, outgoing chief Jamie Resch (a white female) described him as "the exact right person at the exact right moment." She hopes that his influence as well as the redirected funds will help stem the violence that besets Portland's poor areas.

Where *does* Portland stand, violence wise? According to the [UCR](#), its 2018 crime rate, 5.2/1,000, is about on par with New York City. While that's considerably higher than the U.S. overall (3.7), it's nonetheless much better than the 7.2 posted by Minneapolis, that other city we'll talk about. Still, as essays in our "[Neighborhoods](#)" section have repeatedly argued, when it comes to crime it's not really about cities: it's about places *within* cities. And

Offense Count by Category		
Person	Assault Offenses	9,103
	Homicide Offenses	35
	Human Trafficking Offenses	25
	Kidnapping/Abduction	47
	Sex Offenses	695
	Sex Offenses, Nonforcible	25
	Total	9,930
Property	Arson	258
	Bribery	3
	Burglary	4,190
	Counterfeiting/Forgery	813
	Embezzlement	160
	Extortion/Blackmail	30
	Fraud Offenses	3,470
	Larceny Offenses	24,588
	Motor Vehicle Theft	6,553
	Robbery	995
	Stolen Property Offenses	95
	Vandalism	6,288
	Total	47,443
Society	Animal Cruelty Offenses	32
	Drug/Narcotic Offenses	1,725
	Gambling Offenses	0
	Pornography/Obscene Material	70
	Prostitution Offenses	48
	Weapon Law Violations	669
	Total	2,544

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Portland (pop. 654,741) has plenty of those, with [ninety-four neighborhoods](#) in seven districts. Using neighborhoods as the unit of analysis, let's compare!

Our information came from three sources. For crime, we turned to [2019 police data](#) (see above right). In that year Portland reported 59,917 criminal incidents. All but 1,754 were coded for neighborhood. Eliminating neighborhoods with low population counts or those whose Census data was unavailable left 87 neighborhoods with a total population of 611,124. We coded each neighborhood for population and percent in poverty using [2017 Census estimates](#) assembled by the *Portland Monthly*, and for race using [2010 Census figures](#) reported by the City of Portland.

Correlation analysis was applied to examine relationships between poverty, crime rates (no. of crimes per 1,000 pop.) and the percent of black and white residents. The below table displays the Pearson “r” that quantifies the relationships. This statistic ranges from -1 to +1. Zero depicts no relationship; -1 a perfect “negative” relationship (as one variable goes up, the other goes down, in lockstep), and +1 a perfect “positive” relationship (both variables go up and down in lockstep.)

		Pov	PerRate	PropRate	SocRate	TotRate
Pov	Pearson Correlation	1	.464**	.461**	.435**	.463**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	87	87	87	87	87
PctBlack	Pearson Correlation	.232*	-.007	.015	-.031	.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.948	.891	.773	.937
	N	87	87	87	87	87
PctWhite	Pearson Correlation	-.450**	-.073	-.077	-.046	-.075
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.500	.479	.675	.489
	N	87	87	87	87	87

- Poverty and crime (first row): Moderately strong, statistically significant positive correlations between poverty and crime, meaning they tend to go up and down together. (Two asterisks mean that the probability the statistic was generated by chance is less than one in a hundred.)
- Poverty and race (first column): Moderate positive relationship between blacks and poverty, also statistically significant (one asterisk means the probability the statistic was generated by chance is less than five in one-hundred.) And a moderately strong, statistically meaningful negative relationship between whites and poverty. Clearly, blacks are somewhat more likely to live in poor areas, and

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whites are moderately less likely to do so.

- Race and crime: No relationship.

Using total crime rate (TT rate), this table compares the ten most peaceful neighborhoods (top) with the ten most seriously stricken by crime (bottom).

Neighborhood	Pop.	Pct. Pov.	Pct. Black	Pct. Wht	TT crime	Pers. rate	Prop. rate	Soc. rate	TT rate
Pleasant Valley	12743	16.9	1.4	85.4	361	0.1	22.4	0.0	0.6
Crestwood	13916	7.3	0.6	89.7	35	0.2	2.3	0.0	2.5
Collins View	10027	9.2	1.1	90.1	39	0.7	3.2	0.0	3.9
Marshall Park	1358	5.0	0.4	94.3	14	0.7	9.6	0.0	10.3
Cathedral Park	24107	16.5	5.8	78.3	277	1.4	10.0	0.2	11.5
Arnold Creek	2811	3.2	0.4	92.4	36	1.4	11.0	0.4	12.8
Hayhurst	5978	8.6	1.2	90.3	96	3.0	12.9	0.2	16.1
Ardenwald	2010	9.2	1.2	91.8	39	2.0	16.4	1.0	19.4
Ashcreek	5337	7.5	1.4	89.6	109	3.4	16.3	0.7	20.4
Alameda	5622	6.9	4.1	93.8	123	2.0	19.9	0.0	21.9
Hazelwood	25183	20.7	3.4	77.3	3993	23.5	126.2	8.9	158.6
Parkrose	5870	13.1	8.3	70.9	975	29.8	126.7	9.5	166.1
Old Town/Chinatown	7057	15.3	9.1	77.3	1563	70.7	104.0	46.8	221.5
Hollywood	2022	16.6	6.8	84.3	480	22.7	208.2	6.4	237.4
Pearl	7124	16.2	3.6	84.4	1716	25.3	202.4	13.2	240.9
Eliot	3851	23.8	34.6	51.3	1333	39.5	298.9	7.8	346.1
Creston-Kenilworth	1488	20.7	3.1	77.6	624	65.9	335.3	18.1	419.4
Lloyd	2124	25.3	6.4	80.3	1560	102.2	601.7	30.6	734.5
Centennial	1344	29.7	2.2	80.7	1828	311.8	982.1	66.2	1360.1
Downtown	1811	32.8	6.3	76.3	4069	408.1	1711.2	127.6	2246.8

Blacks comprise a very small proportion of the city's population (5.8 percent, according to a [2019 Census estimate](#)) and only a tiny slice of the economically better-off neighborhoods. Here are the correlations if we only consider the twenty neighborhoods at crime's polar extremes:

		Pov	PerRate	PropRate	SocRate	TotRate
Pov	Pearson Correlation	1	.778**	.817**	.743**	.809**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	20	20	20	20	20
PctBlack	Pearson Correlation	0.392	0.070	0.142	0.087	0.127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.087	0.771	0.551	0.715	0.595
	N	20	20	20	20	20
PctWhite	Pearson Correlation	-.657**	-0.280	-0.334	-0.291	-0.323
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.232	0.150	0.214	0.165
	N	20	20	20	20	20

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As one would expect, whites are far less likely to live in the poorest areas ($-.657^{**}$, seventh row). And check out the magnitude of those r 's on the first row. When we cull out the criminally middle-of-the-road places, the statistical relationship between crime and poverty becomes truly formidable.

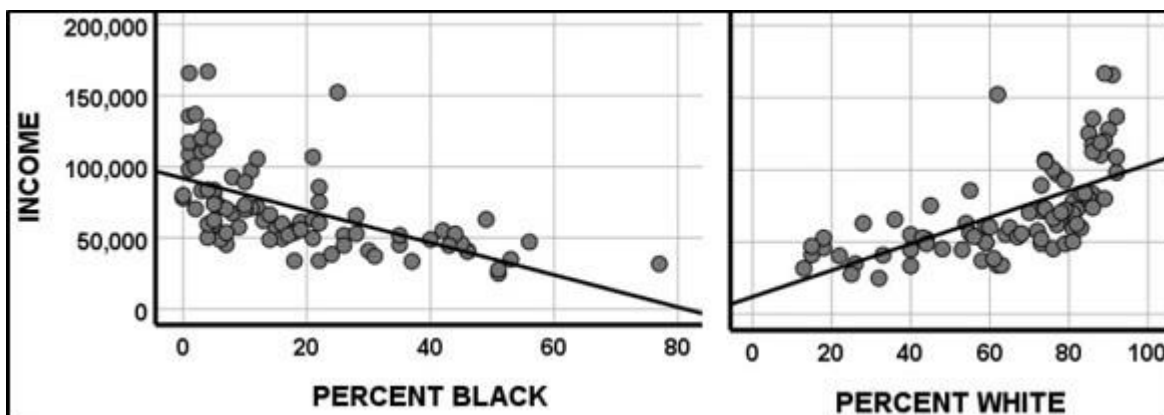
So what about that city whose police department is in the nation's crosshairs? We mean, of course, Minneapolis, where a never-to-be-forgotten video depicts an experienced cop dispassionately (and, ultimately, fatally) [pressing his knees against a helpless man's neck](#). From "[Open Minneapolis](#)," an official website, we downloaded violent crime information (MPD UCR codes 1, 3, 4 and 5) for the one-year period ending June 3, 2020. Three other sources – [Minnesota Compass](#), "[Niche](#)" and [City-Data.com](#) –

		INCOME	VIOL RATE
INCOME	Pearson Correlation	1	$-.475^{**}$
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	85	85
PCT BLACK	Pearson Correlation	$-.591^{**}$	$.659^{**}$
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	85	85
PCT WHITE	Pearson Correlation	$.638^{**}$	$-.722^{**}$
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	85	85

were used to code each neighborhood for median family income, racial distribution and violent crime rate per 1,000 population. After some culling our dataset comprised 85 Minneapolis neighborhoods where 3,749 violent crimes had taken place.

We again used correlation analysis. The table on the left depicts the pertinent relationships. As one would expect, crimes of violence have a meaningful, statistically significant negative relationship with income – as one goes up, the other goes down.

Check out those strong, statistically significant relationships between race and income. Again, they're in the anticipated directions: positive for whites (both go up and down together) and negative for blacks (as one goes up the other goes down.) Here are the graphs. Each "dot" is a neighborhood. Catch the pronounced slope of those trend lines!



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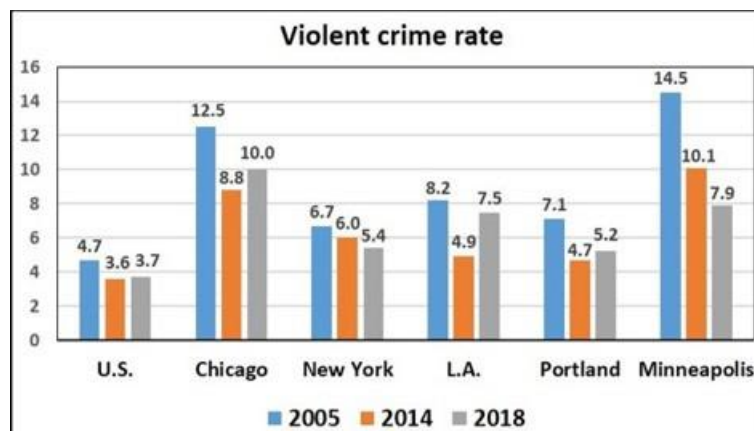
But who needs *r* statistics and graphs? Check out another comparo between neighborhoods at crime's extremes. For Minneapolis it's between the four least violent neighborhoods and the four most:

NEIGHBORHOOD	POP	TT VIOL CR	VIOL CR RATE	PCT BLK	PCT HISP	PCT WHT	INCOME
Camden Industrial	30729	8	0.3	35.0	8.0	44.0	51761
ECCO	2453	2	0.8	1.0	1.0	92.0	108841
Fulton	6355	5	0.8	2.0	1.0	92.0	136824
Linden Hills	7727	6	0.8	4.0	1.0	90.0	127961
Folwell	5742	152	26.5	46.0	6.0	33.0	40938
East Phillips	4253	135	31.7	30.0	30.0	15.0	41012
Downtown West	8084	339	41.9	22.0	4.0	60.0	60383
Hawthorne	4717	199	42.2	46.0	10.0	22.0	40378

Keeping in mind that population sizes differ, the data tells an obvious and very compelling story. Look at the income column. Check out the behavior that accompanies each entry. Then imagine policing the neighborhoods in the lower tier.

Indeed, imagine policing *Minneapolis*. [A story in the *Star-Tribune*](#) about a recent shooting that left one dead and eleven wounded goes on to mention a “surge” of violence that followed the killing of George Floyd, with more than ninety shot in less than thirty days. Considering that twenty-six Minneapolitans have been murdered so far this year ([last year's toll](#) to date was a relatively “measly” fifteen) police chief Medaria Arradondo's lament about a “public health crisis” seems hardly an exaggeration.

According to 2019 Census estimates, 14.9 percent of [Portland's](#) 654,701 inhabitants live in poverty. With 429,606 residents, [Minneapolis](#) has a poverty rate of 19.9 percent, fully one-third worse. That difference is clearly reflected in our analysis. And as we alluded to, in the cities' UCR crime rates. Here is a six-way comparo:



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What to do? As our “neighborhoods” section has harped on for years, what we *really* need is a “Marshall Plan” for America’s chronically poor neighborhoods. Unless we make major efforts – job training, employment and social counseling, drug and alcohol rehab, childcare, tutoring, affordable housing, and so on – their residents will forever remain locked in crime’s embrace.

So where’s that investment going to come from? President Trump’s re-election promise of “a new deal for black America” has long faded into obscurity. Municipal budgets and politics being what they are, poor neighborhoods are essentially left to fend for themselves. Yes, there have been some valiant private efforts. Portland’s “unprecedented wave” of gunplay is being tackled by “We Are the Caution,” a *Facebook* campaign that addresses the misuse of social media to foment violence. It’s the brainchild of two former gang members who created “Men Building Men,” a nonprofit that seeks to steer young men away from the streets.

In the meantime, loose talk about “defunding” the police continues. Portland seems in a far better position to yank money from the cops than Minneapolis. Yet that 2014-2018 uptick in violence, as well as its more recent experiences, give cause for alarm. Even so, latest word is that its police budget of about \$240 million, which had been set for a small increase, *will instead be slashed* by \$15 million.

But violence-stricken Minneapolis has an even better idea: “dismantle” the police *altogether*. A brainchild of the city council, the plan proposes to have unarmed social service teams do what’s needed. That approach (it’ll supposedly take a year to finalize the details) is opposed by the mayor, who would rather “reform” the cops. Ditto, the business community, which worries about the chaos that would engulf a badge-free city. Skepticism has even been voiced by some of the affluent, progressively-oriented residents of the city’s “Powderhorn Park” area, who reacted to the killing of George Floyd by pledging to never again call the police.

Then, sure enough, “stuff” began to happen.

Posted 9/21/20

EXPLAINING...OR IGNORING?

In a badly fractured land, the ambush of two deputies unleashes a raft of excuses. And, as usual, no solutions.

For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Economically, Compton is in a lousy place. Nestled in a chronically poor area of Los Angeles, the incorporated community of about 95,000 [suffers from a 21.9 percent poverty rate](#), about twice the national figure. As one might expect, Compton's reputation crime-wise is also lousy. [Its 2018 toll](#) of 1,174 violent crimes and 22 murders yields rates of 1,200.7 and 22.5 per 100,000 pop., far higher than comparable figures for Los Angeles (747.6 and 6.4) and the U.S. overall (368.9 and 5.0).

Compton's travails are long-standing. So when killings and such happen, it's mostly families, friends and sheriff's deputies who take notice (the city gave up its police department two decades ago). But when a still-unknown assailant snuck up on two deputies sitting in their patrol car, [pulled a pistol and opened fire](#), the world paid attention. That attack, which took place on September 12, caused serious but thankfully non-fatal injuries and both officers are recovering.

Let's place this event in context. [LEOKA](#), the FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted database, presently categorizes some assaults on officers as "unprovoked," meaning they did nothing to prompt an armed exchange. Assaults on officers that involve "entrapment and premeditation" are coded as an "ambush." This table sets out each category's contribution to the felonious murder of law enforcement officers between 2007-2020 (this year's data is thru 9/11):

Fatal attacks	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	TT
Officers killed	58	41	48	56	72	49	27	51	41	66	46	56	48	37	691
Ambush	9	1	6	2	2	3	1	11	7	19	5	11	2	8	87
Unpr. attack	7	5	9	11	6	1	4	1	3	3	3	1	5	2	61

We pored through the LEOKA for equivalent information about *firearm* assaults on officers, regardless of whether an injury occurred. Best we could do is this table, which

breaks out gun “ambushes” since 2014 (we believe that in this dataset “ambush” includes unprovoked attacks):

Firearm assaults on law enf. ofcrs.	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TT
Total	1,950	2,018	2,377	2,677	2,116	11,138
Ambush	44	86	103	110	97	440

Bottom line: about five officers are assaulted with firearms in the U.S. each day. That’s a lot. While “only” four percent – about two per week – are attacked without warning, the threat of being surprised by a murderous gunslinger is real. That vulnerability [led the FBI to warn](#) that ambushes and unprovoked attacks had gone up about twenty percent during the course of a decade and urged that police adjust their protocols accordingly.

Of course, in this gun-besotted, violence-ridden land officers well know they could face gunfire during most any encounter. Here are four examples of ambushes and unprovoked attacks from past posts in our [Gun Control](#) section:

[April 2009](#): A mentally disturbed twenty-two year old would-be “White supremacist” gunned down Philadelphia police officers Eric G. Kelly, Stephen J. Mayhle and Paul J. Sciuillo and wounded two others. Police responded after his worried mother called 9-1-1 to complain about her son’s erratic behavior.

[October 2016](#): Palm Springs police officers Lesley Zerebny and Jose “Gil” Vega were shot and killed by a rifle-wielding twenty-six year old as they stood outside a home to which they were dispatched on a “simple family disturbance.”

[August 2019](#): California Highway Patrol officer Andre Moyer was shot and killed while “filling out paperwork” to impound a traffic violator’s car. His murderer was slain during a wild, protracted shootout with responding officers.

[November 2016](#): Des Moines police Sgt. Anthony Beminio and Urbandale, Iowa officer Justin Martin were murdered by the same killer in ambushes a half-hour apart. Both were found behind the wheel of their cars, still strapped to their seats.

Unlike the above examples, neither had been on a call. Their middle-aged assailant, a “loner” with a history of troubled behavior, ultimately surrendered.

What distinguishes these attacks from the wounding of the L.A. County deputies? In part, their media coverage. The *Los Angeles Times* posted an initial account shortly after the ambush, [then updated it](#) after a news conference held the following morning. Its story mentioned that one of the deputies was thirty-one and was the mother of a six-year old, and that both she and her partner, a male in his early twenties, went through the academy together and had only been on the job slightly more than one year. Sheriff Alex Villanueva and Assemblyman Reggie Jones-Sawyer were both quoted as calling the attack “cowardly.” Here’s what L.A.P.D. Chief Michel Moore had to say:

Tonight we pray for these two guardians to survive. I recognize and acknowledge we live in troubled times. But we must as a community work thru our differences while loudly and resoundly condemn violence. Blessed are the Peacemakers.

Compton was going through a particularly troubled time. Less than two weeks had passed since deputies had shot and killed [Dijon Kizzee](#). An ex-con with convictions for illegally possessing guns, Mr. Kizzee was reportedly riding a bike on the wrong side of the street and fled on foot when deputies tried to stop him. When they closed in he allegedly punched one in the face, and as they scuffled supposedly dropped the handgun he was carrying. [Deputies said they fired](#) when he picked it up.

Mr. Kizzee’s killing [ignited raucous protests](#), which led to their own arrests. Police-citizen tensions were already at a high pitch, inflamed by [the recent killing of a Latino youth](#), shot dead by deputies who said he was armed, and by [deputies’ rough treatment](#) of a suspected looter, an event that a bystander captured on video. As one might expect, this context affected reporting. Only two days after the ambush [an L.A. Times article](#) featured an interview with a “long-time South L.A. activist” who questioned “why such swift calls for justice don’t come when it is the police who cause the injuries.” His comments were followed by a recap of recent alleged abuses, most notably the killing of Mr. Kizzee, and an interview with an academic psychiatrist who insisted that the link some made between “anti-police messaging” and the ambush (e.g., L.A. Sheriff Alex Villanueva’s “words have consequences”) was nothing more than “[confirmation bias](#),” the tendency for people to believe what supports their pre-existing views:

That’s a really, really important thing to point out, because you absolutely will get people who will spin this into meaning that these protests are causing problems.

Well, we certainly don't want to fall into *that* trap. After all, we could get ambushed by, say, [Erika Smith](#)! In an extended "opinion" piece published *three* days after the attack, Ms. Smith, a key member of the *Times* editorial staff, scorned L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger's concern that excessive public criticism of the police may have played a role. Here is what Ms. Barger had said:

I support peaceful protests. But what I don't support are the type of comments, especially the ones made outside a hospital, blocking an emergency room, where two deputies were fighting for their lives, and you had individuals chanting what they were chanting. So I believe that we have slowly crossed that line. And what you've seen is what has manifested in the shooting of those two deputies. I do believe that.

Indeed, [ABC News](#) and other reputable sources had reported that protesters who marched for Mr. Kizzee gathered outside the hospital where the deputies were being treated and chanted "death to the police" and "kill the police." While Ms. Smith agreed that this wasn't a good idea and called the deputies' wounding "a cruel and callous crime," she vigorously objected to the "insinuation" that the attack was caused by anti-cop activism. Supporting "the broader movement for racial justice and police reform," Ms. Smith then launched into a critique of local policing, from the shooting of Mr. Kizzee to the deputy cliques we wrote about in "[Two Sides of the Same Coin](#)."

So what "causes" ambushes? Looking on prior examples, [Richard Poplawski](#), the 22-year old white supremacist who murdered the Philadelphia police officers, was a deeply disturbed youth obsessed with guns and violence. [John Felix](#), 26, who killed the Palm Springs officers, was a volatile, deeply troubled former gang member and had served prison time for armed assault. [Aaron Luther](#), the middle-aged man who killed the CHP officer, was an ex-con with a history of violence. And [Scott Green](#), the middle-aged man who killed the Iowa officers, was an emotionally disturbed spouse abuser "whose life was unraveling." Still, none of these killings served an even remotely "functional" purpose. Our best guess is that they may have reflected a compulsion to assert oneself in the face of societal rejection. But we're not psychologists.

While there was plenty of speculation about their "cause," no one connected any of those murders to a greater social movement. No one suggested that officers were in effect bringing on their own demise. But times have changed. As the academic who shook off the connection between protests and the ambush well knew, "confirmation bias" can cut both ways. Maybe anti-police sentiment didn't embolden the ambusher.

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Maybe it *did*. Perhaps he had been acquainted with Mr. Kizzee or another alleged victim of police brutality. Maybe he had himself been brutalized.

Of course, we know nothing about the triggerman. But once we do, where would probing his reasons take us? Even if we somehow divine the causes of the deputies' ambush, Compton will remain saddled with the baggage that led City-data.com to place it among *the most crime-ridden four percent* of U.S. cities. That's really, really lousy company. To climb out of that hole would take a lot more than protesting police mistreatment. It would call for a frontal assault on poverty and the socioeconomic deforestation that poverty invariably produces. That would require the massive infusion of social and financial capital ("Marshall Plan") that we ceaselessly harp about in our "Neighborhoods" posts. Want to get started? Click on "[But is it Really Satan?](#)" Go to the [Bogalusa Daily News](#) and read what Washington Parish (Louisiana) Sheriff Randy Seal had to say.

Then, get busy!

Posted 11/23/20

FIX THOSE NEIGHBORHOODS!

Creating safe places calls for a comprehensive, organic approach



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. While campaigning in Charlotte four years ago, candidate Trump promised that he would place the nation's impoverished communities on the path to prosperity with major investments in infrastructure, job development and education. He would also fight the disorder that bedevils poor areas and [assure that justice was dispensed equally to all](#). While some Black voices were skeptical about the sincerity of Trump's "New Deal for Black America," others applauded his apparent enthusiasm for reform. Even after eight years of Democratic rule, poverty and crime still beset the inner cities. So give him a chance!

And for a single term, America did. According to the [Fed's most recent \(2019\) survey](#), the economy performed well, with the gross domestic product going up unemployment going down. And until the ravages of the pandemic and urban disorder, violence was also on the way down. According to [FBI figures](#), the violent crime rate dropped one percent during 2018-2019 and property crime fell four and one-half percent.

Yet not everyone benefited. As the Fed noted, income distribution has hardly budged in the last three decades, with the top one-third enjoying about a third of the nation's wealth while the bottom half seems consigned to a measly two percent. [Federal crime statistics](#) demonstrate marked disparities as to place. Detroit closed out 2015 with 295 murders; New York City had 319. Once their populations are taken into account, the Motor City's homicide rate – 43.8 per 100,000 pop. – was *more than ten times* the Big Apple's measly 4.1. Four years later the results proved much the same, with Detroit's 492 murders yielding a 41.4 rate while New York City's 319 homicides delivered a far gentler 3.8, even better than the nation's 5.0.

Considering New York City's seemingly benign crime numbers it seems to make perfect sense that Mayor Bill de Blasio calls it the "[safest big city in America](#)." Only

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problem is, “New York City” is a place name. People live, work and play in *neighborhoods*. And during a career fighting crime, and another trying to figure out where it comes from, your blogger discovered that focusing on tangible places can prove illuminating in ways that yakking about wholes obscures.

Politicians know that. Mayor de Blasio counts on a profusion of prosperous neighborhoods to produce low citywide crime numbers. Consider the Upper East Side. With a population of 220,000 and a poverty rate of only 7.2 percent (versus the city’s twenty), [its police precinct, the 19th.](#), posted zero murders in 2017, one in 2018, and zero again in 2019. And while 2020 has supposedly brought everyone major grief crime-wise, as of November 15 [the 19th. has recorded just one killing](#).

Contrast that with the Big Apple’s downtrodden Brownsville district. Burdened with a 29.4 percent poverty rate, its 86,000 residents have historically endured an abysmal level of violence. Brownsville’s police precinct, the 73rd., logged nine murders in 2017, thirteen in 2018 and eleven in 2019. That produced a murder rate (per 100,000 pop.) *more than three times* New York City’s overall rate and about *thirteen times* that of the Upper East Side. Then consider what happened this year. As of November 15 [the poverty-stricken 73rd.](#) logged an astounding 25 murders, *more than twice* its merely deplorable 2019 figure.

Murders - NYPD precincts								
Pct.	Pop.	Pov. %	2018	Rate	2019	Rate	2020	Rate
19th.	220,000	7.2	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.5
73rd.	86,000	29.4	13	15.1	11	12.8	25	29.1

Upper East Siders managed to shake off the pandemic and George Floyd. Clearly not the Brownsvillians. Note to Hizzoner: they’re both your denizens.

Switch shores. Los Angeles Police Department’s West Los Angeles station serves an affluent area of 228,000 inhabitants. [Its primary ZIP, 90025](#), boasts a poverty rate of 11.25 percent. West L.A. Division reported two murders between January 1 and November 14, 2018, one between those dates in 2019, and four this year. In comparison, the 77th. Street station tends to a score of impoverished neighborhoods. [Its primary Zip code, 90003](#), suffers from a poverty rate of 30.7 percent. Although the 77th. serves a substantially smaller population of about 175,000, it endured far, far more murders ([39](#),

35 and 48) than West L.A. Division during the same periods. And while murder did increase in both areas between 2019 and 2020, check out the leap in the 77th.

Murders - LAPD stations								
Area	Pop.	Pov. %	2018	Rate	2019	Rate	2020	Rate
West L.A.	228,000	11.3	2	0.9	1	0.4	4	1.8
77th. St.	175,000	30.7	39	22.3	35	20	48	27.4

Indeed, things in the poor parts of L.A. have deteriorated so markedly this year that four killings last night in South Los Angeles [caused the city to reach that 300-murder milestone](#) it successfully avoided for a decade. Shades of Brownsville!

So, crime-wise, is there really a “New York City”? An “L.A.”? During the last decade posts in our [“Neighborhoods”](#) special section reported similar disparities within cities across the U.S. For example, consider Minneapolis, that usually tranquil place where the death at the hands of police of [Mr. George Floyd](#) set off national waves of protest that have yet to subside. Coding its eighty-five neighborhoods for violent crimes per 100,000 pop., [we recently compared](#) the four least violent (mean rate 0.7) with the four most brutish (mean rate 35.6). That exposed a huge disparity in mean family income: \$106,347 for the calm areas, \$45,678 in the not-so-peaceful.

So is there only one Minneapolis? No more so than one Portland! Our national capital of dissent has at least 87 neighborhoods. [Comparing the ten neighborhoods](#) with the lowest violence rates (mean=1.5) against the ten with the highest (mean=9.0) revealed that only nine percent of the former were in poverty versus 21.4 percent of the latter. Ditto Baltimore, South Bend, Chicago and elsewhere. (Click [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

It’s hardly a secret that poverty and violence are locked in an embrace. Years ago your blogger and his ATF colleagues discreetly trailed along as traffickers hauled freshly-bought handguns into distressed neighborhoods for resale to local peddlers. Alas, a gun from one of the loads we missed was used to murder a police officer. That tragedy, which haunts me to this day, furnished the inspiration for [“Sources of Crime Guns in Los Angeles, California,”](#) a journal article I wrote while transitioning into academia.

Alas, when yours truly arrived on campus, he found that the criminal justice community was not much interested in neighborhoods. That lack of concern has apparently continued. But ignoring place can easily lead us astray. [A recent study](#) of Chicago’s move to facilitate pre-trial release approvingly notes that defendants let go

after the relaxation were no more apt to reoffend (17 percent) than those released under the older guidelines. To be sure, more crimes *did* happen. ([A news account](#) estimated 200-300 more per year.) But as the authors emphasized, a six-month increase in releases from 8,700 under the old guidelines to 9,200 under the new (5.7 percent) didn't significantly affect crime citywide. Given Chicagoland's formidable crime problem, that's hardly surprising. But set the whole aside. What about the poverty-stricken Chicago neighborhoods where most releasees inevitably wind up? Did *their* residents notice a change? Was it for the better or worse?

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.

That notion, which the [Urban Institute](#) and others have long championed, is nothing new. And while there are some promising nonprofit initiatives – say, [Habitat for Humanity's neighborhood revitalization program](#) – most efforts at urban renewal focus on rehabilitating physical space and helping industries and businesses grow. In today's [Washington Post](#), mayors representing cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky peddled a “Marshall Plan” for Middle America that would create jobs through major investments in renewable power. While that could ostensibly yield great benefits, it hardly addresses the needs of the scores of unskilled, under-educated, poorly-served denizens of our inner cities. That, however, is the goal of [Jobs-Plus](#), a long-standing HUD program that offers employment and educational services to the residents of public housing in designated areas. Its budget? A measly \$15 million. Nationwide.

Meanwhile impoverished communities continue to reel from crime and disorder. So here's a hint for Mr. Biden, who absent a coup, will assume the throne in January. Your predecessor talked up a good idea. Alas, it was just that: “talk.” America urgently needs to invest in its impoverished neighborhoods. A comprehensive “Marshall Plan” that would raise the educational and skill levels and improve the job prospects, lives and health of the inhabitants of these chronically distressed places seems the logical place to start.

Posted 8/20/16

GETTING OUT OF DODGE

For families caught in dangerous neighborhoods, there is one option

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Milwaukee's "[Sherman Park](#)" is one of the city's oldest residential districts. [Google it](#), plop down your pedestrian and amble down the lavishly tree-lined streets. Admire the finely crafted homes, built during the early 1900s by prosperous German immigrants. Most still stand, though in truth, some just barely. Really, things don't seem as well kept as one might wish. There sure is an awful lot of chain link! It turns out that in an area less than two miles square, [more than thirty homes are in foreclosure](#).

But forget Sherman Park. Sadly, the years haven't been kind to Milwaukee. Murder in 2015 soared to 152, [a 69 percent increase from 2014](#) when 94 homicides were tallied. Blacks suffer disproportionately. In a city that is [about forty percent black](#), [seventy percent of murder victims](#) in 2014 and eighty-four percent in 2015 were black. So far this year Milwaukee has recorded 76 murders. [Seventy-six percent of the victims](#) are black (13 percent were white, eight percent Hispanic and three percent of Asian descent.)

Milwaukee's residents [have many explanations](#) for the chaos engulfing their neighborhoods:

Ask anyone in Milwaukee and they'll have a different answer: Deep systemic problems of poverty, unemployment, segregation and education. Easy access to firearms. Lack of personal responsibility and the breakdown of the family. An ineffective criminal justice system. Lax sentencing. A pursuit policy critics say too often limits police chases. Too much policing. Not enough policing.

Edward Flynn, Milwaukee's somewhat controversial police chief, [explained the uptick in violence](#) more simply, as an increased willingness to settle differences with a bullet:

Maintaining one's status and credibility and honor, if you will, within that peer community is literally a matter of life and death. And that's coupled with a very harsh reality, which is the mental calculation of those who live in that strata that it is more dangerous to get caught without their gun than to get caught with their gun.

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Over the decades, [as Sherman Park transitioned](#) from upper-middle class, exclusively-white, to working class, majority-black, crime and disorder [has taken an increasing toll](#). Still, as Sherman Park is only one troubled place out of many, no one outside Milwaukee paid attention. That dramatically changed on Saturday, August 13, when a police officer patrolling in Sherman Park [shot and killed](#) an armed man who fled on foot from a traffic stop. Sylville Smith, 23, had prior arrests for drug possession, robbery, a shooting and witness intimidation. His only conviction, though, was for misdemeanor carrying a concealed weapon, and it seems that he later obtained a concealed-carry permit. (The gun he possessed when shot had been reported stolen.)

Over the next two days, demonstrations and rioting rocked Sherman Park, and [multiple businesses were looted and set on fire](#). Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett issued an impassioned plea for harmony:

We are asking every resident of this community to do everything they can to help us restore order. If you're a mother who is watching this right now, and your young son or daughter is not home, and you think they're in this area, get them home right now. This is a serious situation – and this is a neighborhood that has unfortunately been affected by violence in the past. There are a lot of really, really good people who live in this area, in the Sherman Park area, who can't stand, like any of us, can't stand this violence.

Sherman Park has an active community association. Two days after the shooting, a citizen [posted this plea on their Facebook page](#). It was addressed to the local Alderman:

...Long before this weekend, many of my neighbors were afraid of “that part” of Milwaukee. They miss out on great things like the Fondy Farmers Mkt because of the perception of danger. They won't stop for gas or groceries on their way home because they are afraid. I am asking you to condemn the criminals. The youth in that neighborhood are killing each other. They are robbing each other. They are burning down businesses that serve a neighborhood that is served by too few...Please stop burying the condemnation under a pile of misguided justification, or sadly, the families in your neighborhood will continue to bury Milwaukee's youth....

In this blog we've speculated plenty about the causes of crime and disorder. (Check out, for example, the “[Crime and Punishment](#)” topical area.) Most recently, in “[Location, Location, Location](#),” we suggested that instead of obsessing about city crime rates, one ought to look to where the roots of violence actually lie, meaning neighborhoods. But this isn't a post about the causes of crime, or how to fight it. It's about *equity*. Lower-income areas of Milwaukee (and Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, Newark...) can resemble

the Wild West. Where does that leave law-abiding families who may be economically unable to leave?

That was the core dilemma addressed during President Bill Clinton's first term by [an adventurous Federal experiment](#). Four-thousand-plus low-income families living in poverty-stricken areas of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York were enrolled in the "Moving to Opportunity" program (MTO). They were randomly assigned to one of three groups: an experimental group that received the usual, unrestricted "Section 8" housing vouchers; an experimental group that got vouchers restricted for use in areas where the poverty rate was ten percent or less; and a control group that received assistance but no voucher.

[A study that compared](#) effects on the voucher and control groups ten to fifteen years later paints a somewhat mixed picture. Forty-eight percent of the restricted group and sixty-three percent of the unrestricted Section 8 group actually used their vouchers. Their reasons seemed basically the same: to escape gangs and drugs and find better schools for their children. Families that used restricted vouchers ultimately wound up in areas where poverty hovered around twenty percent. That was twice the intended limit, but still about half the poverty rate of where the no-voucher controls lived, where poverty hovered around forty percent. Participants with unrestricted vouchers fell somewhere in-between. As one might expect, the lower-poverty areas were also somewhat less segregated (75 percent minority for the experimental groups versus 88 percent for the controls.) While statistically significant, the difference doesn't seem all that compelling, leading one to wonder whether the subsidies were sufficiently large to create a pronounced effect.

Issues of dosage aside, how much of a difference was there between the subsidized and control groups? In several key areas, none. Economic self-sufficiency, employment/unemployment, youth "risky behavior" and youth educational achievement came out about the same. On the other hand, families with vouchers apparently did benefit in other ways. Adults in the voucher groups liked their neighbors better, were far less likely to see drugs being sold or used, and felt much safer. That's consistent with official data, which revealed that they faced substantially lower levels of violent crime than the controls. Measures of health, including body mass, diabetes and psychological state were significantly better for adults in the voucher groups. Their subjective well-being (SWB) scores, which reflect overall experiences, were also much higher.

Still, the main reasons for using the vouchers had to do with kids, and their outcomes didn't seem improved. (In fact, moving into "better" areas seemed to set boys back.) Two years after the official report, a team of Harvard researchers [took another, more](#)

[intensive look](#) at the MTO's effects on children. They discovered that age seemed crucial. Children in the subsidized "experimental" groups who relocated before age 13 enjoyed significantly higher incomes as adults than the unsubsidized controls. They were more likely to go to college, to a better college, and to live in better neighborhoods, and less likely to become single parents. Relocating, though, had negative consequences for older children.

Baltimore's participants in the MTO program got their own study, "[Living Here has Changed My Whole Perspective: How Escaping Inner-City Poverty Shapes Neighborhood and Housing Choice](#)" (*Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Spring 2014.) According to its authors, relocating to better neighborhoods greatly raised families' expectations about what schools and neighborhoods should provide.

Unrestricted "Section 8" housing vouchers continue to be issued. However, funding is very limited. [HUD's fact sheet](#) cautions that waiting lists may be long. What's more, finances, work reasons, reluctance by landlords, a lack of preparedness, poor counseling and other factors can lead families who get vouchers [to wind up living](#) in areas that are far from desirable. According to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), 343,000 children in Section 8 households resided in "extremely poor neighborhoods" in 2014. Changes, starting with far more robust funding, seem definitely called for.

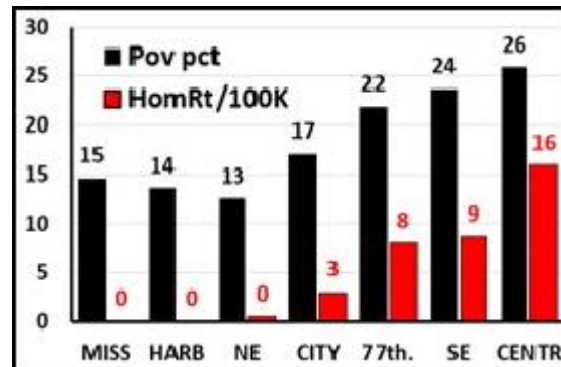
It's been argued that the "[toxic stress](#)" of life in areas ridden by poverty and violence has grave effects on child development; even if families eventually relocate, improved life outcomes may be out of reach. What to do? With all due credit to the citizen-reformers who are hard at work in Sherman Park and like communities, their efforts won't change the circumstances that kids who live in poverty faced yesterday, and will face again today and tomorrow. Your family, kind reader, and mine presumably live in "respectable" areas with good schools and minimal strife. Doing so, we know, requires a certain income. So it's a matter of simple equity (not "charity") to give children who would otherwise suffer the disadvantages of growing up in poverty the same opportunities we provide our own. While we wait (and wait, and wait) for improvements in police-community relations and such to yield their promised gains, helping families "Get out of Dodge" today – not tomorrow – seems a pressing imperative.

Of course, some would say that encouraging "good people" to leave only accelerates decay. There's truth in that, all right. So here's a corrective. Ask the skeptics to trade places with impacted families in, say, Sherman Park. It's the least they could do.

Posted 6/16/23

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%

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%

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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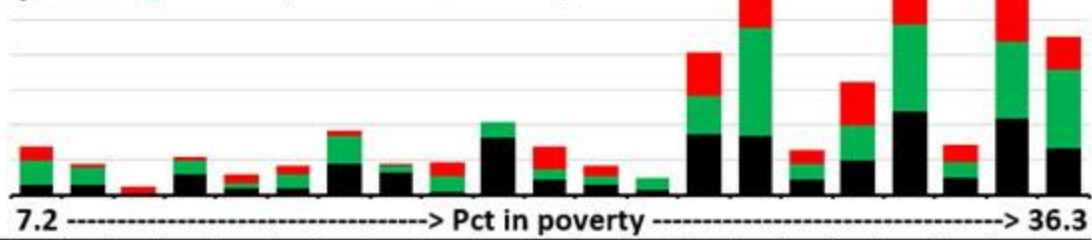
Average poverty scores for the highest-rate groups was substantially higher than for the lowest-rate groups for each year and crime type. Really, the pronounced connection between violent crime and poverty could hardly be more obvious. And unlike those comparatively benevolent “citywide” crime numbers (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

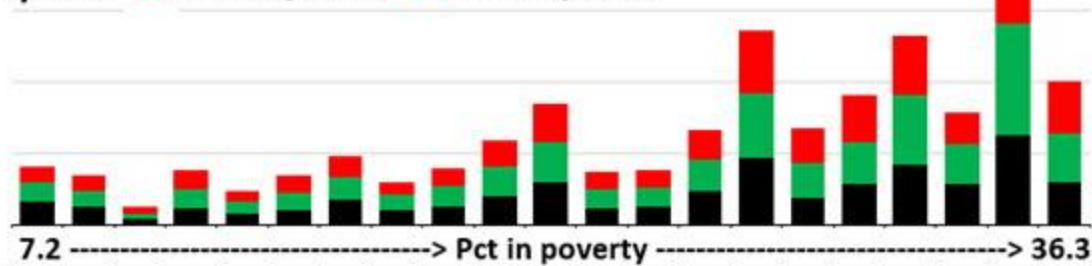
■ Jan-May 2021 ■ Jan-May 2022 ■ Jan-May 2023



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

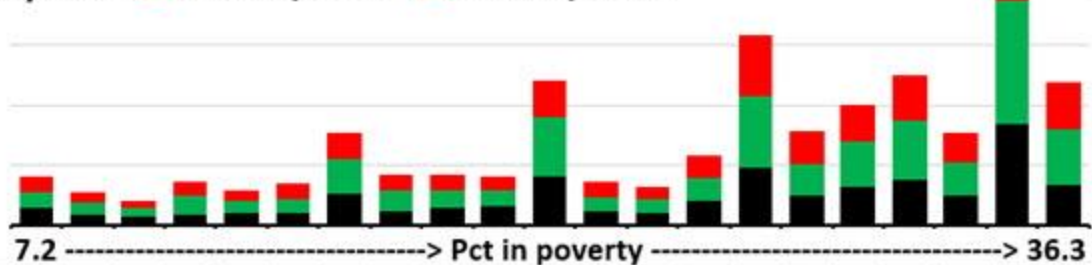
■ Jan-May 2021 ■ Jan-May 2022 ■ Jan-May 2023



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

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

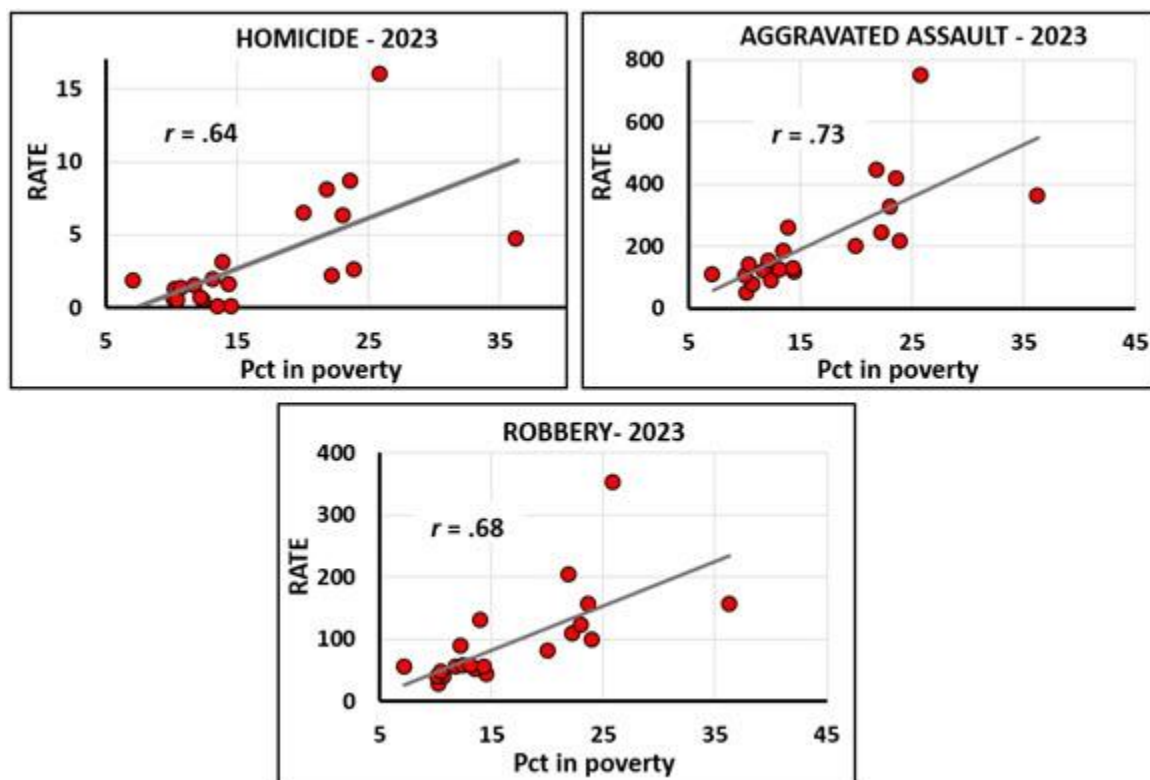


Rates 2023	52	38	25	46	36	53	86	54	55	49	128	53	41	79	201	106	119	153	97	351	155
Rates 2022	55	42	30	62	45	49	116	69	56	52	197	50	46	72	241	106	155	198	111	415	188
Rates 2021	55	32	27	35	36	37	104	44	57	60	160	43	37	81	191	99	124	149	99	335	132

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.]

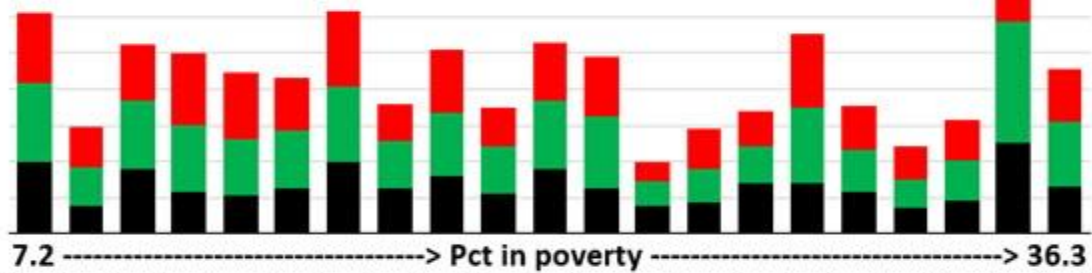
Our results show strong, positive r ’s between poverty and each violent crime type: .64 between poverty rate and homicide, .73 between poverty rate and aggravated assault, and .68 between poverty rate and robbery. Here are the “scattergrams” (each dot represents a Division):



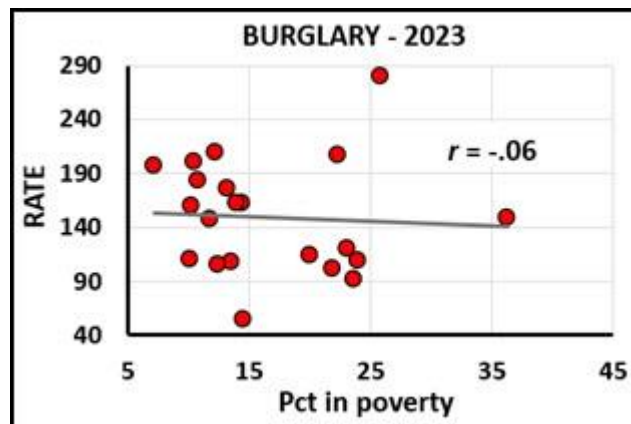
Fine, poverty and violence go together. But does that extend to serious property crime? Say, burglary? Here’s that comparo:

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...

Posted 9/27/22

HARD TIMES IN “THE BIG EASY”

In New Orleans, poverty and crime go together like, well...



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Louisiana’s largest city occasionally draws our attention over the behavior of its cops (click [here](#) and [here](#)). As former mayor Mitch Landrieu [noted](#) when the Justice Department stepped in over a decade ago, “I have inherited a police force that has been described by many as one of the worst police departments in the country.” DOJ soon issued [a massive report](#) that upbraided officers for making unwarranted stops and arrests, using excessive force, and demonstrating bias against women and minorities. Managers weren’t ignored. They drew considerable scorn for a preoccupation with numbers, which “diverts attention and resources from quality arrests, community engagement, and more considered problem-solving.” In 2018 the city entered into an elaborate [consent decree](#) that required NOPD fundamentally change its way of doing business, both within *and* on the streets.

We’ve cautioned about the consequences of pushing numerical productivity. Indeed, *Police Issues* has a special section on “[Quantity and Quality](#).” So was *that* the cause of NOPD’s alleged dysfunction? Or is something more fundamental at work? DOJ’s slap-down offered an intriguing clue:

Some argue that, given the difficulty of police work, officers must at times police harshly and bend the rules when a community is confronted with seemingly intransigent high levels of crime. Policing is undeniably difficult; however, experience and study in the policing field have made it clear that bending the rules and ignoring the Constitution makes effective policing much more challenging.

As it turns out, those “intransigent” levels of crime have beset The Big Easy for a very long time. Unfortunately, our recent probe of Louisiana (“[But is it Really Satan?](#)”)

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altogether ignored the State's largest city. So imagine our despair when we recently came across the *Wall Street Journal's* splendid (and deeply sobering) piece, "[New Orleans Has America's No. 1 Murder Rate. 'We're in a Crisis.'](#)" Based on [data recently published](#) by the Major Chiefs Association, it reports that New Orleans' homicide rates aren't just in the pits – they're the worst in the land!

We decided to check for ourselves. MCCA published violent crime numbers for the first six months of 2021 and 2022 for seventy major U.S. cities and metro areas. Using 2021 population estimates from the Census (click [here](#) and [here](#)) we computed homicide rates (per 100,000 pop.) for every place surveyed by the Chiefs. And the results definitely bear out the Journal's despair. On the left are the most murder-ridden areas, rate-wise. On the right is a comparo between the nation's murder capital (New Orleans) and five major cities that frequently appear in our posts. Really, if being worst counts, The Big Easy "easily" earns the trophy.

Rank /70	City	Pop	Hom 2022	Rate 2022
1	New Orleans	376971	155	41.1
2	Baltimore	576498	179	31.0
3	St. Louis	299310	86	29.3
4	Detroit	632464	133	21.0
5	Memphis	628127	121	19.3
6	Milwaukee	569330	109	19.1

Rank /70	City	Pop	Hom 2022	Rate 2022
1	New Orleans	376971	155	41.1
9	Philadelphia	1576251	257	16.3
10	Washington DC	670050	104	15.5
18	Chicago	2696555	311	11.5
44	Los Angeles	3849297	186	4.8
56	New York City	8467513	207	2.4

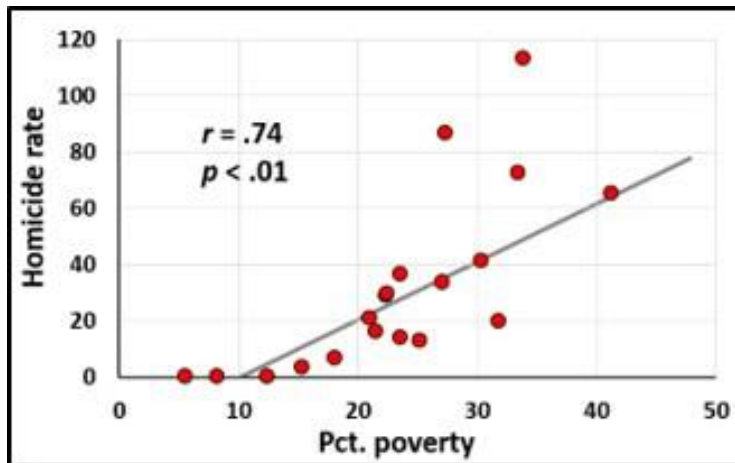
Full stop. For the past decade, essays in our [Neighborhoods](#) special topic have warned that results of such comparisons may not be as meaningful as one assumes. After all, cities *are* artificial constructs. New York City brags about its safety. According to the table, its homicide rate does seem benign. But as we pointed out in "[Fix Those Neighborhoods](#)", the Big Apple's peaceful character doesn't extend to its poorer districts. Say, Brownsville (pop. 86,000), which sports a deplorable murder rate of 29.1.

We don't look on economic conditions as the ultimate cause of violence. Poverty rates, though, seem to function as a surrogate for an unholy alliance of factors (e.g., unemployment, lack of child care, ill-behaved peers) that can collectively make life miserable. And get folks killed. So instead of simply wagging our finger at The Big Easy, let's look *within*. Our main source, New Orleans P.D.'s "[Electronic Police Report 2022](#)" provides basic information on "all Police Reports filed by NOPD officers". To align our results with the Major Chiefs data, we focused on the first six months of 2022, from

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January 1 through June 30, selecting every entry coded as “HOMICIDE” and where victim status was “FATAL.”

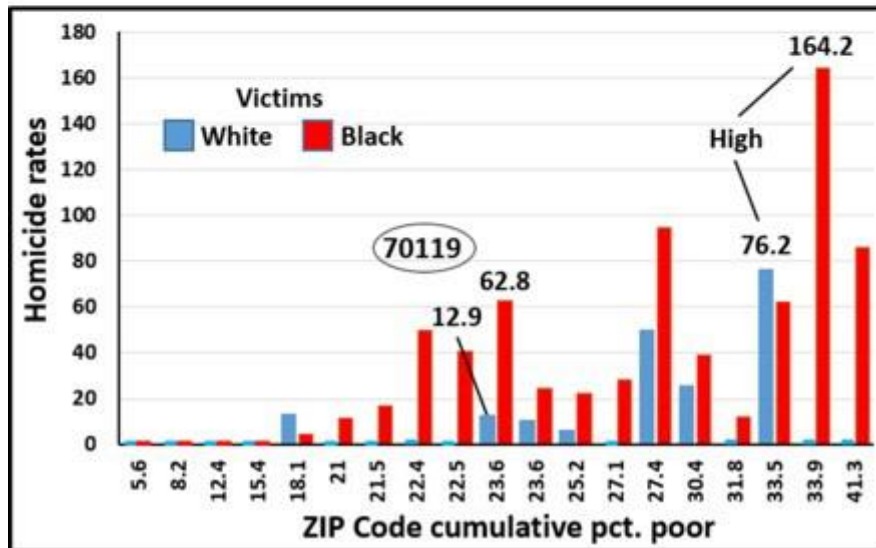
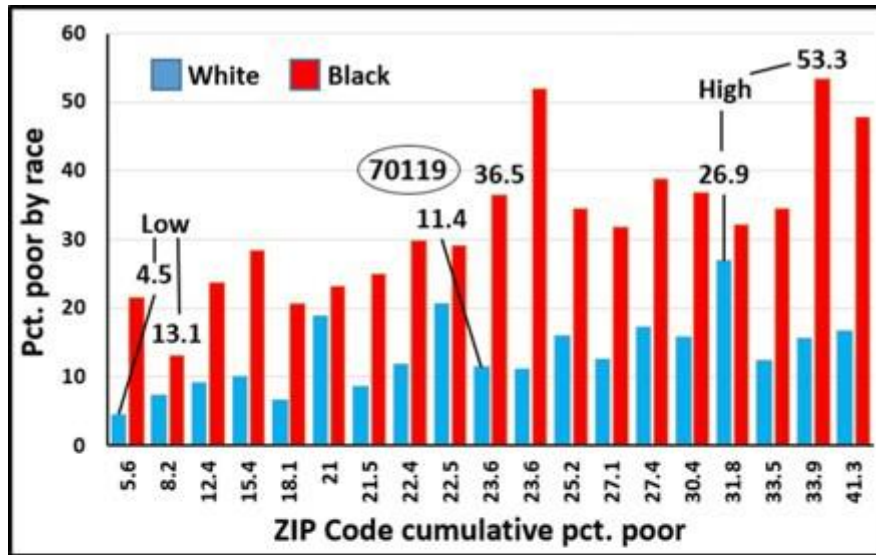
That process yielded 101 homicide victims. For step 2 – *where* in New Orleans? – we queried the incidents’ street locations in Google. That yielded sixteen ZIP codes (the city has nineteen principal ZIP’s, but three – 70121, 70123 and 70124 – had no homicides during our timeframe.) We then turned to the [Census](#) and gathered 2019 ACS estimates for each ZIP’s population and percent in poverty: cumulative, “White alone” and “Black or African American alone.” (And yes, we share. Click [here](#) for the data.)



Our first order of business was to look for a relationship between ZIP code poverty percentages and murder rates (per 100,000 pop.) As our graph indicates, their correlation was in the expected direction (more poverty, more murder) and *very* robust. In fact, the “*r*” statistic of .74 turned out to be virtually identical to the .73 “*r*” yielded by our 2021 comparison of poverty and

violence rates for New York City’s 59 Districts (“[Woke up, America!](#)”).

And just like in New York City (and everywhere else we’ve ever looked) the consequences fell hardest on the racial and ethnic groups that disproportionately inhabit the city’s poorer areas. [According to the Census](#), New Orleans’ population of 376,971 is 33.4 pct. White and 59.2 pct. Black. Overall poverty is 24.8 pct., with Black poverty (33.2 pct.) nearly three times that of Whites (12 pct.) Check out these graphs, which arrange New Orleans’ nineteen regular Zip codes by percent of residents in poverty, with the wealthiest Zip (5.6 pct. poor) on the left and the most economically deprived (41.3 pct. poor) on the right:



	Pop. White	Pop. Black	White Pov.	Black Pov.	White Vict.	Hom Rt White	Black Vict.	Hom Rt Black
70119	15535	15935	11.4	36.5	2	12.9	10	62.8

Black residents are doubly disadvantaged. As ZIP Code poverty rates worsen, their share of the population (top graph) and rate of homicide victimization (bottom graph) substantially increase. Consider, for example, Zip 70119, with a mid-ranked 23.6 pct. cumulative poverty score. Although it has about the same number of White and Black residents, the latter were *three times* more likely to be poor and *five times* more likely to be murdered.

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So are economics entirely to blame for New Orleans' travails? Maybe not. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, and to [a recent article](#) in *The Lens*, the consent decree, and the elaborate internal controls it produced, led many cops to leave. It's also reportedly hampered recruitment, which is in the dumps across the U.S. Specialized NOPD units were stripped to augment depleted patrol ranks, and 9-1-1 responses are interminably delayed. So much so, that many citizens and businesses have taken up arms. Or simply left. Meanwhile the Federal judge overseeing the consent decree announced that, contrary to her recent suggestion, [the end is not exactly in sight](#). According to U.S. District Judge Susie Morgan, problems with "crime reporting data, calls for service and response time" require an "innovative" response. Given [NOPD's severe staffing shortage](#), though, that definitely seems a stretch.

But maybe not. Perhaps that coach-person can pull out a solution from their top hat. So we'll see.

Posted 9/12/19

HUMAN RENEWAL

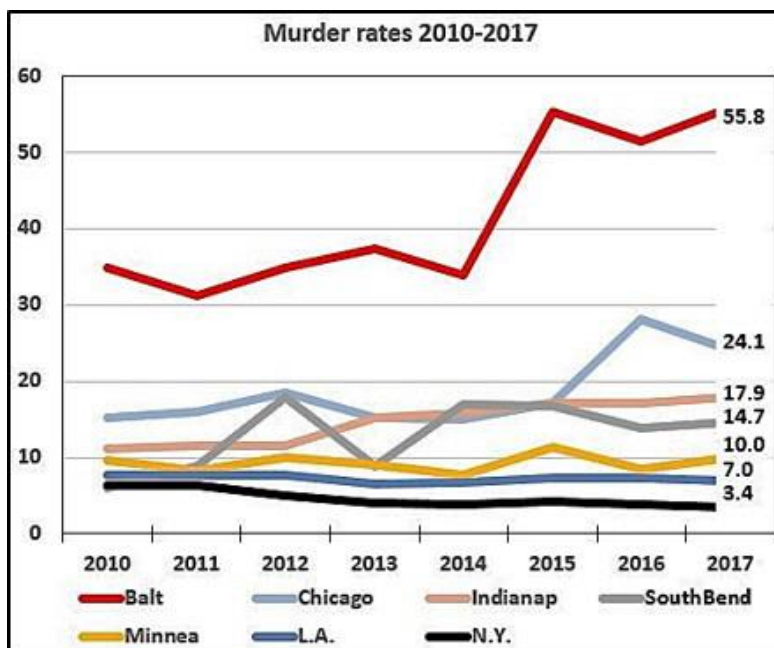
Despite redevelopment, South Bend poverty and crime remain locked in an embrace

Image shown online is 2015 shooting location, 141 S. Liberty St., from <https://data-southbend.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/criminally-assaulted-shootings/data> and Google maps

For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. In 2013, one year into his first term, South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg (yes, the Presidential candidate) released [a plan](#) to revitalize the city's neighborhoods by tearing down or refurbishing 1,000 vacant and abandoned homes in 1,000 days. In the end, about sixty percent of these bedraggled properties fell to the wrecking ball. To be sure, many residents were pleased to have these drug dens and hangouts for ruffians and the homeless gone. A [colorful brochure](#) promised that "reuse strategies" would quickly transform these now-empty spaces into parks and community gardens.

Years later, [vacant lots still abound](#). Still, Mayor Pete recently launched a program to help residents fund home remodels, and the city probably does look a bit prettier.

But our main concern is with crime. [According to the FBI](#), South Bend changed reporting practices for the "violent crime" category in 2016, making reliable comparisons to prior years impossible. So we turn to murders. In 2010 South Bend had [six homicides](#), yielding a not-so-bad rate of 5.8/100,000 pop., only one point worse than the [national average of 4.8](#). Things, though, quickly deteriorated. South Bend



closed out 2012, Mayor Pete's first full year in office, with a depressing [eighteen murders](#). That translated into a rate of 17.8, nearly four times [the nation's 4.7](#).

As the graph illustrates, South Bend's numbers have since fluctuated. But the trend doesn't seem particularly favorable. In 2017, the most recent year with reliable data,

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the city recorded sixteen murders. While a 14.7 rate seems somewhat of an improvement, it was still far higher than the U.S. rate, which had [ticked up to 5.7](#). Indeed, South Bend's performance was so bad that it earned the city unwelcome recognition as 2017's [twenty-ninth most murderous municipality](#).

Still, as we recently preached in "[Repeat After Us](#)", when it comes to crime there really is no "South Bend" any more than there is a "New York City," a "Baltimore," or a "Los Angeles." If we're interested in *causes*, [neighborhoods](#) are what really counts. South Bend has plenty of those. An impressive website, "[Neighborhood Resources Connection](#)" (NRC) identifies more than two dozen. Many are blessed with resident associations that seem to brim with activity and good will.

When it comes to building communities, though, poverty is a daunting obstacle. And South Bend's numbers are alarming. According to the [Census](#), 12.4 percent of individuals in the U.S. [fell below the poverty level](#) in 2000, and 14.6 percent in 2017. In South Bend the corresponding figures were [16.7%](#) in 2000 and [25.4%](#) - more than one in four - in 2017. For your area's numbers go to [American Fact Finder](#), enter city name or ZIP code and click on "poverty." (Your writer did that. His predominantly working-class city came in at 15.8 percent, and the middle-class ZIP code where he resides returned a far more reassuring 4.3 percent.)

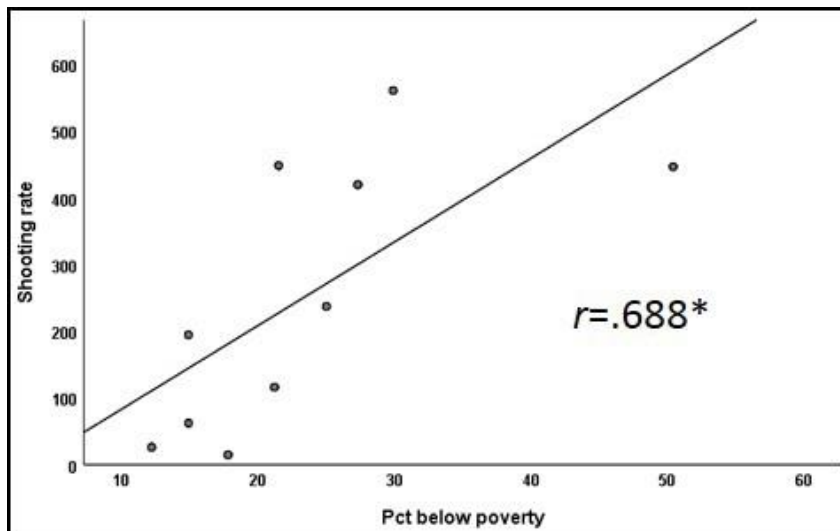
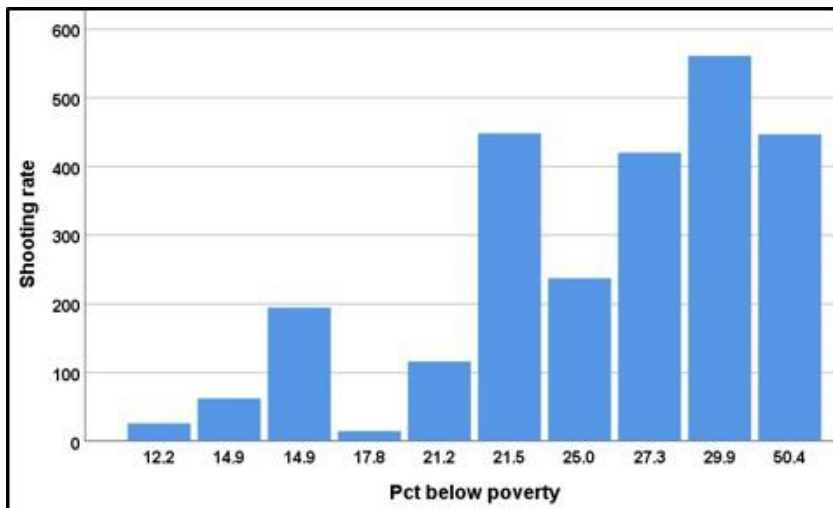
If South Bend follows the [well-known pattern](#), prosperous neighborhoods will have less crime, particularly of the violent kind, than their less-fortunate peers. Unfortunately, South Bend doesn't break down crime by neighborhood. Fortunately, the city has been tracking and posting data about "[criminally assaulted shootings](#)" since 2015. According to a local official, each entry represents a purposeful, criminal shooting that wounded or killed someone other than the gunslinger. Gun crimes only: no suicides.

There were 346 such shootings between January 2015 and December 2018. Turning to ZIP code as a stand-in for "neighborhood," we were able to code all incidents but five with Google maps. We then used 2017 Census estimates to enter each ZIP code's population and percent below poverty. Dividing assaultive shootings by number of residents, then multiplying by 100,000, yielded a cumulative, four-year shooting rate for each ZIP. These rates were then compared to percentage of residents under the poverty line. As poverty increased, what happened to the shooting rate?

Here's the data, with ZIP codes arranged by percent of individuals below the poverty line. (ZIP code 46556, for the University of Notre Dame, was omitted for technical reasons. Also note that several ZIP codes include locations outside the city limits.)

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ZIP	Bel Pov	Pop	Shtg	Murd	ShtgRate	MurRate
46637	12.2	15257	4	1	26.2	6.6
46614	14.9	30504	19	4	62.3	13.1
46617	14.9	9246	18	3	194.7	32.4
46635	17.8	6728	1	0	14.9	0.0
46615	21.2	13760	16	5	116.3	36.3
46628	21.5	25202	113	15	448.4	59.5
46619	25	22332	53	7	237.3	31.3
46616	27.3	5714	24	6	420.0	105.0
46613	29.9	10874	61	7	561.0	64.4
46601	50.4	6491	29	3	446.8	46.2



Clearly, as percent of individuals below the poverty line goes up, so do the shooting rates. For the statistically-minded, the correlation was .688* (statistically significant,

with less than five chances in one-hundred that the coefficient was produced by chance.) Controlling for population only reduced the association slightly, to .676. We also tested other plausible relationships, such as between population size and shooting rates. None of the coefficients approached significance.

No, the measures aren't in lock-step. After all, ZIP codes are imperfect surrogates for neighborhoods. Still, the results clearly support the notion that in South Bend as elsewhere, poverty drives crime. Yet despite its evident problem, South Bend seems stuck in place. In a [May 2018 op-ed](#) about the city's crime problems Mayor Buttigieg made absolutely no mention of its even more woeful economy. One year later [the controversial police killing](#) of a black resident would force him to return home during the Presidential campaign. Perhaps Hizzoner just couldn't spare the attention. His [conventional redevelopment initiatives](#) are hardly the way to fight poverty. In fact, some fear they will lead to gentrification and adversely affect the city's low-income residents.

What to do? "[Mission Impossible?](#)" pointed out that even the best policing can't offer a lasting remedy for the crime and disorder that accompany poverty. So fix poverty! According to the [Urban Institute](#), that calls for a truly comprehensive approach that includes child care, transportation, job training, apprenticeships and summer jobs. One example, [Jobs-Plus](#), provides employment opportunities, job training and financial incentives to residents of public housing projects in thirteen States. (Alas, Indiana's not on the list.)

Fortunately, not everyone in South Bend has a tin ear. [Mr. Buttigieg is not running for re-election](#). In his campaign for the Democratic nomination, former mayoral candidate Jason Critchlow went well beyond traditional bricks-and-mortar redevelopment to promise that, as mayor, he would "lead an effort to create training and entrepreneurship programs in order to assist residents in creating economic opportunities within their own community." (Critchlow [earned the local newspaper's endorsement](#). But he failed to get the voters' nod.)

Again, look at those poverty numbers! We hope that whoever's elected will focus on the disturbing fact that a great many of their constituents are, plainly speaking, poor. City leaders must go well beyond their evident preoccupation with the city's physical decline and formulate a comprehensive plan for redeveloping South Bend's *human* potential. Implement *that* and the consequences of poverty – rampant homelessness, poor health, unchecked crime and disorder – *will* disappear.

Guaranteed.

Posted 6/20/24

IS CRIME *REALLY* DOWN? IT DEPENDS...

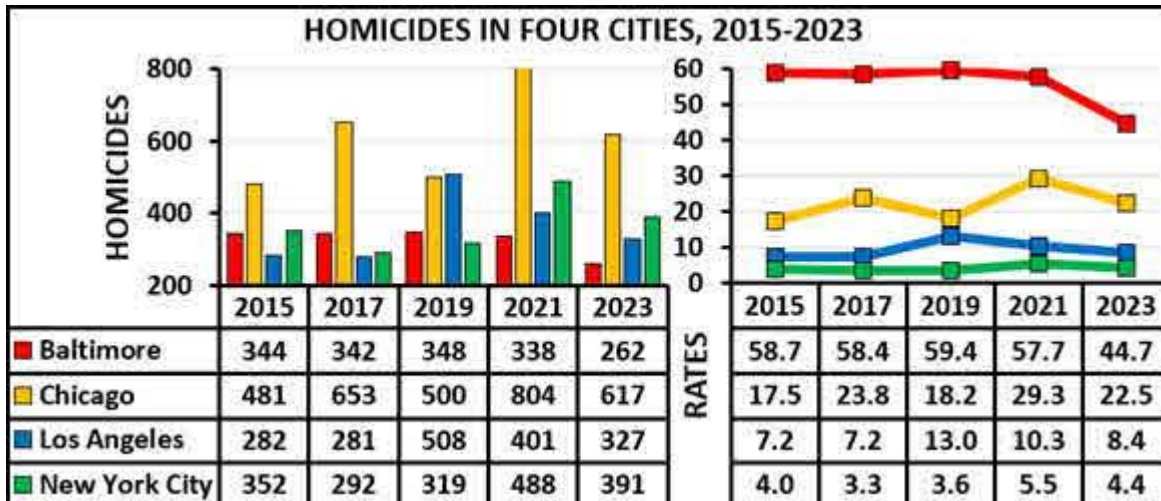
Even when citywide numbers improve, place really, really matters



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Finally, some good news. And from our Chief's inner circle, no less! According to the deputy head of the spanking-new [White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention](#), Baltimore's drop in killings is "[the greatest success story](#)" in the land. Indeed, its 2023 murder count of 262 is the "Charm City's" lowest toll since 1970. Baltimore's most recent quarterly numbers are also supposedly very promising. (For more trumpeting about the city's comeback check out "[With Baltimore homicides dropping below 300, who gets to take credit?](#)").

We've often mentioned Baltimore's struggle with crime and violence (see, for example, "[Police Slowdowns, Part I](#).") So the reported improvement was of great interest. Alas, the apparent turnaround came on the heels of some very bad news about our home burg. [During his recent interview](#) by the *Los Angeles Times*, LAPD interim Chief Dominic Choi observed that while his city's violent crime numbers are about the same as last year, murders did increase about eleven percent when compared to the first half of 2023.

Chief Choi's comments definitely got our attention. After all, if that spurt in killings continues, it could thrash L.A.'s reputation. But before bringing out the tinsel (for Baltimore) and the hankies (for L.A.) let's see how they compare with other major burg's. Say, Chicago and New York City. Cranking up our calculator (well, an Excel spreadsheet) we assembled 2015-2023 homicide counts for Baltimore, L.A., New York City and Chicago. Data came from the [UCR](#), the [Baltimore Sun](#), [Chicago P.D.](#), the [L.A. Almanac](#), and the [City of New York](#). And since the cities differ in size, rates were computed using population figures from the [Census](#). Here's the product:



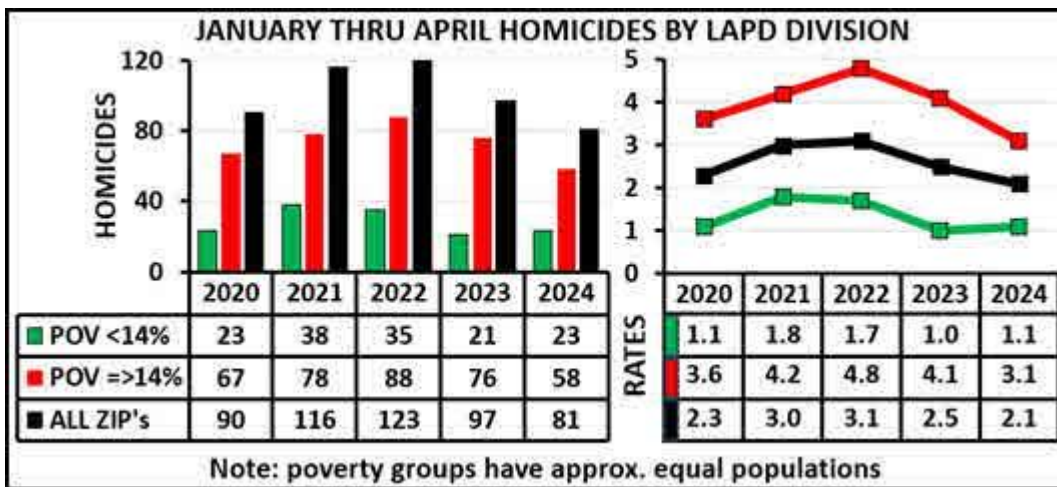
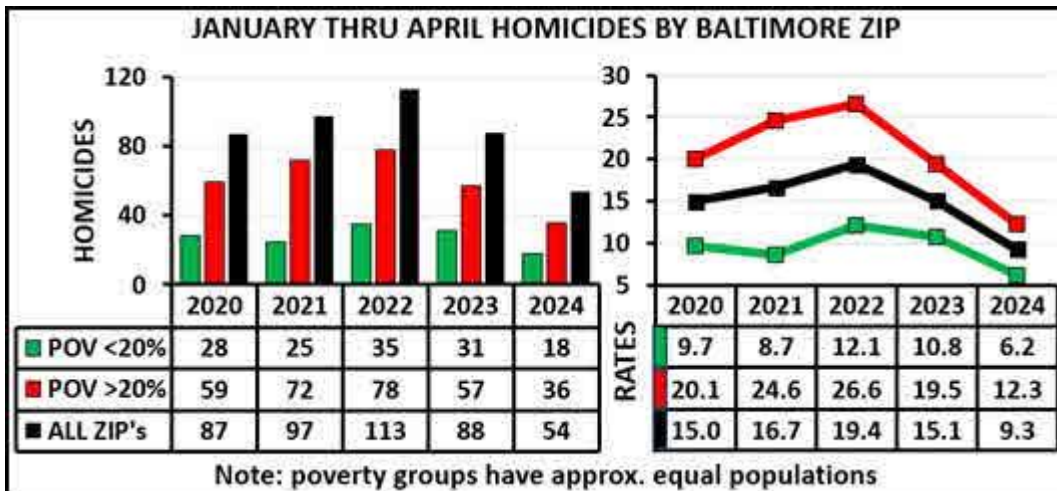
Each city *has* demonstrated substantial progress. Baltimore’s homicide numbers, for example, declined by 22.5 percent between 2021-2023. But disparities in population size can deceive. Switch to the graph on the right. Improvements notwithstanding, Baltimore wound up with a sky-high rate of 44.7 homicides per 100,000 residents. That’s twice that of bad-old Chicago. It’s also *more than five times* L.A.’s rate and *ten times* the Big Apple’s.

Yikes.

So is crime *really* on the mend? And if so, for *whom*? After a decade-and-a-half of poring through crime data, we’re convinced that (as our subtitle insists) place really, *really* matters. That, indeed, was the title of our 2020 post, “[Place Matters](#)”. To take in-depth looks within Baltimore and Los Angeles we compiled homicide counts for each city during the first four months of 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. Each city’s population was split into high-poverty (red) and a low-poverty (green) groups of approximately equal size, and four-month (i.e., partial year) homicide rates were computed for each.

- Baltimore crime data came from its [city website](#). We coded each homicide location’s ZIP code and obtained its poverty rate from the [Census](#). To correct for ZIP’s that cross city boundaries, their percentage of Baltimore’s population was obtained from [US Zip Codes](#). Baltimore residents were assigned to two groups of approximately equal size: those living within ZIP’s with poverty rates between 5.4% and 19.1%, and those residing in ZIP’s with poverty rates between 21.5% and 40.8%.
- Los Angeles crime data was also pulled from the [city website](#). Homicide locations were coded for a police Division, and rates were computed rates using LAPD

Division population and poverty figures from our 2023 post, [“Does Race Drive Policing?”](#). As in Baltimore, L.A. residents were split into two groups of about the same size: residents of LAPD Divisions with poverty rates between 7.2% and 13.6%, and residents of Divisions with poverty rates between 14% and 36.3%. Here are the products:



What's the uptake? Despite a small, recent increase in homicide rates in L.A.'s lower-poverty zone, January thru April murder rates have improved for both cities since 2022. Still, poverty matters. *A lot*. Residents of Baltimore's higher-poverty ZIP's have consistently suffered from homicide rates that are at least *twice* as high as those endured by their more fortunate peers. Meanwhile, in comparatively tony Los Angeles, the proportionate disadvantage between affluent and not-so-affluent Divisions is about *three-fold*.

And as far as comparing Baltimore and Los Angeles...fuhgeddaboudit!

Residents of economically-deprived areas are well aware of their vulnerability. Say, the residents of Baltimore's "Brooklyn Homes" neighborhood, where [more than one in four](#) live in poverty. That's where on July 2, 2023 as many as ten shooters [opened fire during a yearly celebration](#), killing two and wounding twenty-eight. [According to the AP](#), the carnage – reportedly Baltimore's worst-ever mass shooting – took place during the same week that the Feds bragged about reducing violence in the beset city. Their "success" was clearly lost on the war-weary sixty-six year old who bandaged the leg of a wounded teen. "They don't even know what life is, they don't," she lamented. "All they know is guns."



Her son and grandson were killed in prior shootings.

Violence and hooliganism don't just plague Baltimore. "The safety numbers that are reflected citywide don't necessarily reflect our reality."

Last year, after a shooting that wounded nine and killed two, that's how the executive director of L.A.'s Urban Peace Institute [described the gap](#) between the city's favorable overall numbers and life in violence-beset Watts. Burdened with a poverty rate of 21.9%, residents of LAPD's 77th Street area endure [one of the five highest homicide rates](#) out of 21 LAPD Divisions. Switch to another member of the murderous "bottom five", the adjoining Southeast area (poverty 23.7%). Click on the image to check out what happened [at a local auto parts store this June](#).

Of course, it's not just poor areas. [As we recently reported](#), violent crime has a way of intruding into assumedly "safe" places. Say, the upscale L.A. suburb of Tustin ([poverty, 10.1%](#)) where an off-duty member of the President's Secret Service detail [was accosted by an armed robber](#). (He's still on the lam). Or, say, L.A.'s affluent Venice neighborhood ([poverty 9.8%](#)), which features miles of canals lined with "multimillion dollar homes." That's where [a brutal attack](#) on two middle-aged residents by a homeless man left the "shaken community" struggling with how to respond to the unhoused in their midst.

Crime and violence have a way of intruding just about anywhere. But the profound advantages that prosperous areas enjoy – not only in Baltimore and L.A., but *everywhere* – offers an obvious path for improvement. Here's a closing shot from the closing shot in ["Fix Those Neighborhoods!"](#) (November, 2020):

...here's a hint for Mr. Biden, who absent a coup, will assume the throne in January. Your predecessor talked up a good idea. Alas, it was just that: "talk." America urgently needs to invest in its impoverished neighborhoods. A comprehensive "Marshall Plan" that would raise the educational and skill levels and improve the job prospects, lives and health of the inhabitants of these chronically distressed places seems the logical place to start.

If you come up with a better solution, be sure to let us know!

Posted 2/27/17

IS CRIME UP OR DOWN? WELL, IT DEPENDS...

It depends on where one sits, when we compare, and on who counts

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. While browsing [The Crime Report's](#) February 15 newsletter, its Top Story, "[New Crime Stats Run Counter to Trump's Dystopian View](#)," caught our attention. So we clicked on it. As promised, or perhaps over-promised, the brief, two-paragraph account pointed to falling crime rates in San Diego, Rocky Mount, N.C., Lowell, Mass. and Battle Creek, Michigan as proof positive that it's not crime but [President Trump's evident obsession](#) with it that's really out of control.

The Crime Report is not alone. Reassuring comments about crime pervade the media. San Diego police chief Shelley Zimmerman [boasted to the local paper](#) that the city's near five-percent drop in violent crime during 2015-2016 (actually, 4.5 percent) "isn't just a statistic or a random number" but "represents real people." Her boss, Mayor Kevin Faulconer, bragged that "our city is safe because of the incredible partnerships forged between our community and our San Diego Police Department." Natch, there's always a fly in the ointment. Later on the article mentioned that yes, some forms of violence did increase, with twelve more homicides, six more rapes and nine more robberies in 2016 (each victim was presumably a "real" person as well.) Here's the data from the [SFPD website](#):

SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL CRIME ACTUALS
1950 - 2016

Year	Population	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Aggr. Assault	Violent Crime	Burglary	Larceny	Vehicle Theft	Property Crime
2016	1,391,676	49	572	1,387	3,323	5,331	4,743	18,042	5,839	28,624
2015	1,368,061	37	566	1,378	3,601	5,582	5,129	18,933	5,096	29,158

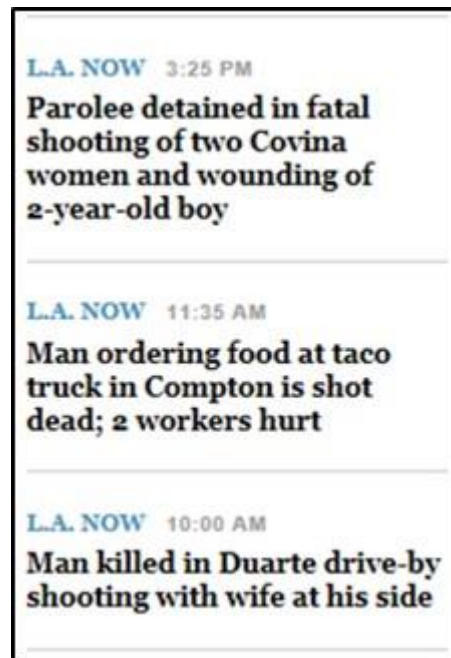
San Diego's decline in violence was driven by a 7.7 percent reduction in the number of aggravated assault reports – 278 fewer, to be exact. Without that, there would have been little to crow about. (We'll have more to say about counting issues later.)

So is crime up or down? Just below the "Dystopian" piece a "READ NEXT" prompt directs readers to "[More Big-City Murders: A Blip or an Ominous Trend?](#)". Although this brief article concedes that murder is going up in some places, it prominently features the reassuring comment of noted criminologist Alfred Blumstein, that "the national homicide rate is way below what it was in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s." That view is reinforced with a link to "[Another Fact-Check of Crime Rates Find Trump is Wrong](#)", a

summary of [a Minneapolis Star-Tribune article](#) that soft-pedals recent jumps in Chicago and elsewhere with graphs that display a multi-decade national downtrend in violent crime.

So far so good. But the same page in *The Crime Report* also featured a link to “[Chicago Police Boss: ‘Enough is Enough’ After 3 Kids Killed](#),” a heart-rending piece that recapped [a Chicago Tribune account](#) about the shooting deaths of three Chicago children in four days. Indeed, even the most “liberal” media outlets are conceding that violent crime seems to be creeping up: “Though mostly far below their record levels in the 1980s and 1990s, homicides have jumped dramatically in some U.S. cities over the last two years, breaking from America’s decades-long decline in violent crime....” ([Los Angeles Times](#), 1/4/17). While that story focuses on the usual suspects – Chicago, Baltimore, Milwaukee, etc. – it eventually allows that things aren’t perfect even at home: “Homicides also rose in Los Angeles in 2016, but by a much smaller amount: 5%. The city is still far less deadly than it was even a decade ago.”

Fast-forward six weeks. Here’s a sidebar from the February 19 *Los Angeles Times* website, just as it appeared at 4:38 pm:

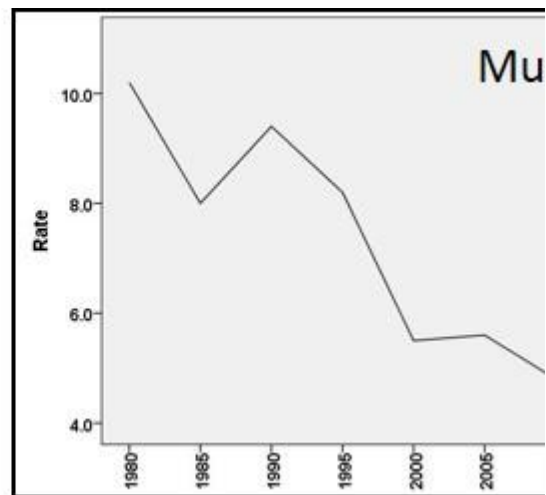
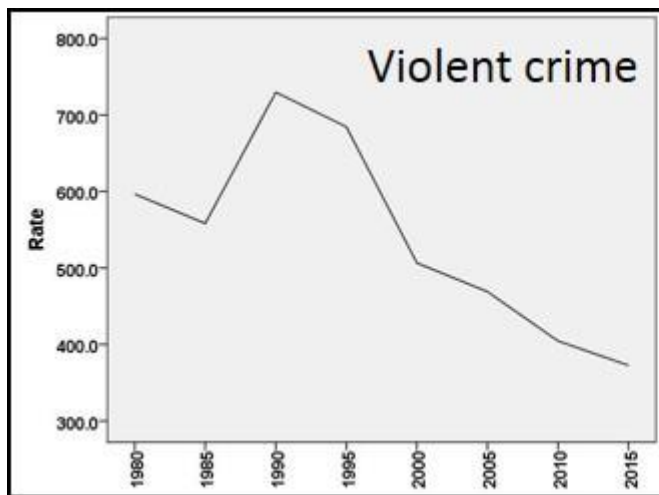


Here’s the following day’s lead story:

One officer dead, another injured in shootout after report of traffic collision in Whittier

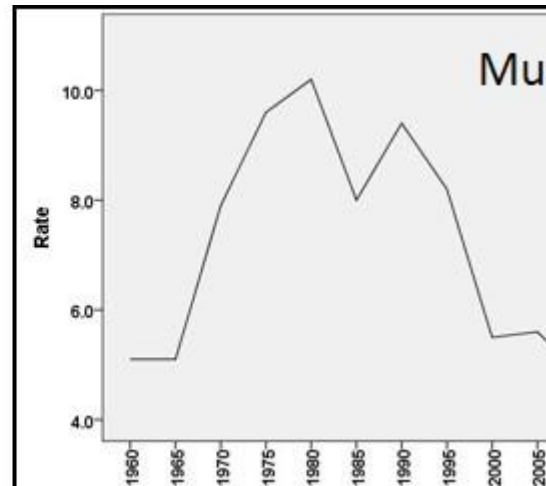
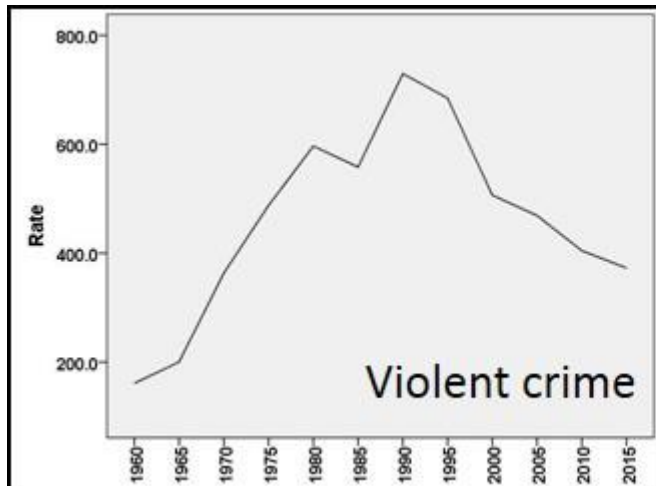
No “yes, but’s” there. After taking in the disturbing events of these successive and, believe it or not, randomly plucked days, would *Times* readers be more likely to agree that President Trump is “dystopian” or that the honorable Dr. Blumstein is a bit “Pollyannaish”?

Police report [four categories of violent crime](#) to the FBI: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. These comprise the “violent crime index,” or number of offenses per 100,000 population. Below are graphs depicting two trends since 1980, one for violent crime, and the other for its murder and non-negligent manslaughter component. Each was built using the FBI’s online tools (click [here](#) and [here](#)).



Both trends follow essentially the same pattern. If the data is correct, and excepting an uptick in the late 80’s and early 90’s that is often attributed to the crack cocaine epidemic, all forms of violence have been dropping since at least the eighties (1985 is often used as a start date since that’s as far back as the FBI reports crime trends for cities and counties).

If that’s as far back as we go – and most media accounts venture no earlier – the “Great Crime Drop” seems very real. But here’s the trend line going back to 1960:



At present, the U.S. murder rate is comparable to the sixties, while violent crime is substantially higher. Really, when compared with other supposedly modern societies, America's always been in dire straits. [England](#) and [Wales](#) (joint pop. about 58.2 million) [had a combined 695 homicides](#) during the 2015-2016 fiscal year. Their murder rate, 1.2, is *less than one-quarter* the 2015 U.S. rate ([15,696 murders and non-negligent manslaughters](#), pop. 321,418,820, rate 4.9.) Meanwhile, neighborly [Canada](#) had 604 homicides *country-wide* in 2015, yielding a murder rate of 1.7. [America's ten most murderous cities](#) in 2016 had murder rates ranging from Atlanta's merely deplorable 23.9 to St. Louis' jaw-dropping 59.3. As for sheer number of killings, England and Wales and Canada are easily outpaced by the City of Chicago alone, which closed out 2016 with a record [762 murders](#).

Let's recap. Current violence rates seem a lot better when compared against 1980 than against 1960. Clearly, *when* is crucial. *Where* one sits is also important (and we don't just mean which *country*.) A measly twenty miles separate the [Los Angeles-area communities](#) of Westwood (pop. 51,485, one murder in 2015) and Florence (pop. 49,001, 18 murders in 2015). Where would you rather live?

Who counts is also crucial. Prior posts - "[Cooking the Books](#)", "[The Numbers Game](#)," "[Liars Figure](#)" and "[Is the UCR Being Mugged?](#)" - described alleged schemes by police in Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Dallas, Miami, Baltimore, Nashville, New Orleans, St. Louis and elsewhere to exaggerate their effectiveness against crime by discouraging victims from filing reports and by furtively downgrading what went on the books. Aggravated assault, normally the most substantial contributor to the violent crime index, was a principal target, but not even homicides were spared. Suffice it to say that in these halcyon days of Compstat, there has indeed been "a whole lot of cheatin' going on." So when San Diego reports that aggravated assaults are down while other forms of violence, including murder, are up, we say..."really?".

Posted 12/17/16

IS TRUMP RIGHT ABOUT THE INNER CITIES?

America's low-income communities desperately need a New Deal

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. On the evening before Thanksgiving, as residents of Southern California prepared to celebrate the forthcoming holiday with family and friends, [a 16-year old high school student](#) was on the way home from church, riding in the family car, her dog on her lap.

Danah Rojo-Rivas didn't survive the trip, and neither would the pooch. About 9:30 pm, as their vehicle drove through [Lynwood](#), a low-income, predominantly minority city with a substantial violent crime problem, gunfire erupted. A bullet fired by gang members riding in one vehicle at gangsters riding in another pierced the car, striking Danah and instantly killing her.

Her mother and brother, who were also in the vehicle, weren't hurt. Alas, the dog bolted and got run over.

Incredibly – or perhaps, not – this horrifying event received only modest attention. Other than an offer by the County Board of Supervisors of [a \\$20,000 reward](#) for information (later raised to \$30,000), the deplorable specter of an innocent girl being viciously gunned down was treated as just another murder in a murderous place. A GoFundMe memorial page was set up by the family to cover funeral costs, and so far there haven't been any arrests.

“You're the only one that can get you out of this ghetto.” [That was the message](#) that Regina Bejarano, a 47-year old single mother of five, prayed would get through to her kids. [With sixty-five homicides](#) so far this year, violence-ridden San Bernardino, an eastern Los Angeles County community of 216,000, was decidedly chancy, and life in her gang-infested neighborhood particularly so. On the last day of August unknown hooligans walked up to their apartment and opened fire, wounding her 19-year-old son, a goddaughter and a family friend.

Fortunately, no one died. Neither was anyone arrested. Desperate to escape the treacherous city where she was raised, Ms. Bejarano began frantically searching for a safe, affordable place far from the mayhem. She was still looking on October 30 when Joseph, her 17-year old, left on a brief walk to visit his cousin. He never got there. Police

later arrested Miguel Cordova, 18, for shooting and killing Joseph in what authorities say was a gang-inspired murder.

Ms. Bejarano still intends for the family to relocate. And although it's only a couple blocks away, she always drives to the spot where Joseph died. It's far too dangerous to walk.

Danah Rojo-Rivas and Joseph Bejarano died in gang shootings; one by accident, the other on purpose. Shamefully, while many of our nation's urban areas experience appalling levels of mayhem – St. Louis, Baltimore, Detroit, Newark, Cleveland, Oakland, Memphis and Chicago [are only a few examples](#) – President Obama has mostly kept mum.

Well, there is one exception. [Three years ago](#), when inner-city gang members shot and killed Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year old high school student, Michelle Obama attended the young woman's funeral. Hadiya was special because she had performed, along with classmates, at the President's second inauguration, in Chicago, the city where he was raised. [President Obama later spoke](#) of the tragedy in a speech and in his [State of the Union address](#), both times while urging action on Federal gun laws. He's otherwise fastidiously avoided addressing – or dealing with – the disastrous cycle of poverty and violence that besets America's inner cities. That oversight has puzzled more than this observer. Here's a recent assessment of the President's legacy by someone whom your writer never thought he'd be quoting – [the redoubtable Louis Farrakhan](#):

...Mr. President, you're from Chicago, and so am I. I go out in the streets with the people. I visited the worst neighborhoods. I talked to the gangs. And while I was out there talking to them, they said "You know, Farrakhan, the president ain't never come. Could you get him to come and look after us?" There's your legacy, Mr. President. It's in the streets with your suffering people, Mr. President. And if you can't go and see about them, then don't worry about your legacy 'cause the white people that you served so well, they'll preserve your legacy...

Many progressives consider the term "inner city" a needlessly cruel way to denote lower-income urban neighborhoods. Yet whatever one wishes to call these places – for Mr. Farrakhan, it's "the streets" – that's where violence takes its most shocking toll. Click on "[Location, Location, Location](#)" and look up "Vermont Square" on the Murder Rate graph. This was the place called home by the senior citizen who convinced city fathers [to help destigmatize notorious South-Central Los Angeles](#) by dropping "Central" from its place name. Well, good luck with that. Crime in Southern California may have

receded from its crack-fueled peak in the early 90s, but gross inequities in personal risk persist. Note, for example, that Vermont Square's 2015 ghastly murder rate of 24.62 per 100,000 (44,662 residents, 11 homicides) is *thirteen times* that of Westwood, an upper-middle class area where the price of an ordinary home easily tops a million bucks (1 homicide/51,485 residents/rate 1.94).

It's not just un La-La land. Life in poor areas anywhere can prove dangerous. That includes the President's hometown. (For a new assessment of violence in inner-city Chicago, click [here](#).)

What's being done to address the pressing needs of inner cities? Considering their lamentable state, far from enough. Government funding for housing assistance, job training, education, child care and drug and alcohol treatment is grossly inadequate, constraining both direct action and heroic efforts by citizen groups and non-profits. (For the sobering experiences of a major public-private effort click [here](#).) Meanwhile overtaxed, wary police and social workers provide what fleeting, temporary relief they can. And as we know, occasionally make things worse.

Really, for all the jawboning about "urban renewal" and such it seems that most of what gets renewed every four years is disinterest and neglect. So when then-candidate Donald Trump – a Republican – got on the soapbox about fighting urban blight and disorder, even a few Democrats found something to like. In an article published shortly before the election, award-winning *New York Times* reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones [concluded, to her evident surprise](#), that Trump "was speaking more directly about the particular struggles of working-class black Americans and describing how the government should help them more than any presidential candidate in years."

Was she exaggerating? Consider Trump's expansive view about his responsibility to the denizens of inner-city Milwaukee:

Our job is to make life more comfortable for the African-American parent who wants their kids to be able to safely walk the streets. Or the senior citizen waiting for a bus, or the young child walking home from school. For every one violent protester, there are a hundred moms and dads and kids on the same city block who just want to be able to sleep safely at night.

Still, other than, say, paying for more cops, what would Trump actually do? A hint of his approach came during a Charlotte speech [where he offered a "New Deal for Black America"](#) that used tax holidays and other incentives to spur investment in the inner

cities. His message resonated with the host of a local radio program, who complained that the black community had been ignored by the present Administration: “As an African-American, I haven’t seen anything that Obama has actually done.”

Well, one thing that the current President and his predecessors *have* done is build up America’s defense arsenal, creating lots of middle-class jobs and, not incidentally, helping make a gaggle of industrialists filthy rich. Consider, for example, [Lockheed’s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program](#). So far, it has cost taxpayers \$100 *billion*, a stunning amount that’s raised a lot of eyebrows, from Senator John McCain (he called the situation a “scandal and a tragedy”) to the President-elect’s. Here’s his Tweet on point: “The F-35 program and cost is out of control. Billions of dollars can and will be saved on military (and other) purchases after January 20th.” He didn’t say, but there’s a special place where “billions” might do some good...

Alas, in his final end-of-year press conference on December 16, which your blogger listened to in its near-entirety (our local NPR station eventually cut away), President Obama was silent about urban America. Other than for briefly reassuring his flock that, yes, he worried every night about their economic well-being, it was all about the election and foreign policy. To be sure, the cities are in large part the responsibility of local and State officials, so it’s likely inevitable that the President would be preoccupied by matters that fall within his exclusive purview, such as the tragedy besetting the innocent citizens of Aleppo and Sudan. Yet one wonders whether our nation’s top elected official shouldn’t be equally determined to keep vulnerable residents of the U.S. from suffering a similar fate. The late Danah Rojo-Rivas, Joseph Bejarano and Hadiya Pendleton would have probably agreed.

Parsing campaign rhetoric is a fraught enterprise, and we’ll leave it for the reader to intuit the President-elect’s real intentions. His emphasis on the inner city, though, is refreshing. As long as it’s not all about bricks and mortar, his “New Deal” seems appealing. One-hundred *billion* bucks would be a good start.

Posted 5/3/21

LET'S STOP PRETENDING

Cops can't correct what most needs fixing



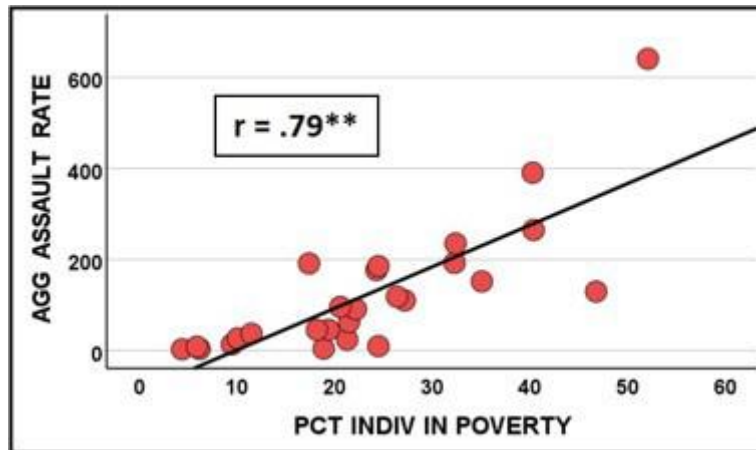
Ma'Khia Bryant Adam Toledo Daunte Wright

For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. It's a heartbreaking sight, and no less so because we know [how things turned out](#) for the sixteen-year old. Alas, little about Ma'Khia Bryant or her circumstances were likely known by the Columbus, Ohio officer who pulled up to the chaotic scene in response to a 9-1-1 call about someone aggressively wielding a knife. (For a video taken from across the street click [here](#). For a stop-motion bodycam video click [here](#).)

Clearly, the cop had only moments to act. But as one might expect, he was promptly condemned. No less a figure than [LeBron James quickly tweeted](#) a sarcastic "YOU'RE NEXT #ACCOUNTABILITY." Once body cam and bystander videos surfaced, though, their depiction of the speed at which events unfolded and the imminent threat to life somewhat muted the criticism. Taking the time to "de-escalate" could have been the same as doing nothing. Colleagues and citizens from across the racial spectrum have come to the star-crossed officer's defense. Yet regardless of their (admittedly belated) support, consider how killing a young person must feel.

However justifiable, the shooting reignited chronic discontent. Only six years after Columbus resolved [a DOJ patterns-and-practices inquiry](#) into alleged police misconduct, [its Mayor asked](#) (and activists demanded) that the Feds launch another. We're well aware that the present tenor is to blame poor outcomes on the cops, and only the cops. And we agree that there's always something to gain by dispassionately analyzing their practices. We've done it ourselves. This time, though, let's focus on something that's beyond the power of even the most enlightened officers to change. We're talking, of course, about *place*.

We'll start with Columbus. It has [twenty-six regular ZIP codes](#). We collected their population and poverty rates from the [Census](#), and computed the number of aggravated assaults using the [LexisNexis community crime map](#), to which Columbus PD contributes. (2019 was chosen to avoid the influences of the pandemic.)



Check out the scattergram. Each ZIP code is represented by a dot. Note how poverty and aggravated assault (rate per 100,000 pop.) increase in nearly lock-step fashion. Their association, which yields a robust .79 “r” coefficient, reflects the powerful relationship between crime and economic conditions that we harp about in our [Neighborhoods](#) essays.

Five best (lowest) rates					Five worst (highest) rates				
ZIP	POP	PCT INDIV IN POVERTY	2019 AGG ASLTS	AGG ASLT RATE	ZIP	POP	PCT INDIV IN POVERTY	2019 AGG ASLTS	AGG ASLT RATE
43221	33360	4.4	1	3.0	43205	12455	32.3	24	192.7
43220	27265	6.2	1	3.7	43223	24222	32.4	57	235.3
43231	22122	18.9	1	4.5	43203	7924	40.4	21	265
43230	58540	5.9	5	8.5	43211	23030	40.3	90	390.8
43202	20491	24.5	2	9.8	43222	4056	52.1	26	641
Mean =		12.0	2	5.9	Mean =		39.5	43.6	345

To make the connection between poverty and violence even more evident we

ZIP	POP	PCT INDIV IN POVERTY	2019 AGG ASLTS	AGG ASLT RATE
43232	46879	20.6	45	96.0

compared the five ZIP’s with the lowest aggravated assault rates with the five ZIP’s at the other end. Look at the their rates. Their contrast

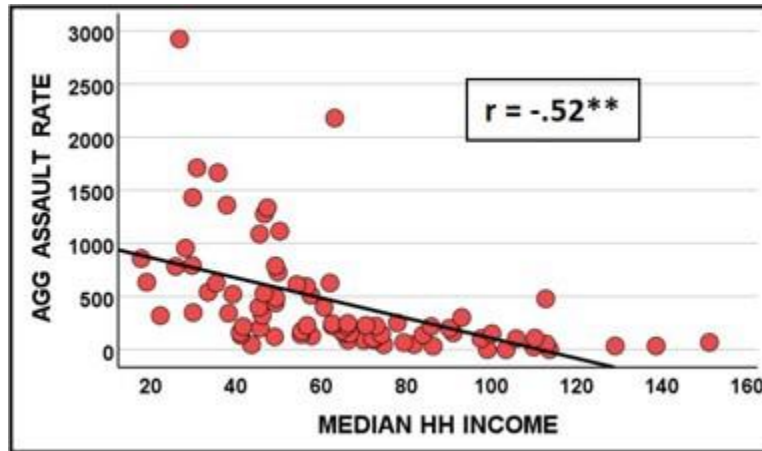
could hardly be greater. Ma'Khia Bryant lost her life in a different neighborhood, [ZIP 43232](#). Its poverty and aggravated assault rates, which seem sizeable from an outsider's perspective, fall about midway through the city's distribution. But Ms. Bryant wasn't raised there. Her mother lost custody of her four children long ago. About two years ago, after a stint with grandma didn't work out, social services assigned Ms. Bryant and a younger sister to be fostered by a White couple. That's where they were living when the tragedy happened.

Minneapolis is another place that's been long battered by poverty and episodes of policing gone wrong. [Derek Chauvin](#) isn't the only MPD cop who's been convicted of murder. Only two years ago then-MPD officer [Mohammed Noor](#) was found guilty of murdering a 9-1-1 caller whom he impulsively mistook as a threat. And there's been some recent local competition. On Friday, April 11, as Chauvin's trial closed its second week, a police officer employed by Brooklyn Center, an incorporated Minneapolis suburb of about 30,000, [accidentally drew the wrong weapon](#). Although Kim Potter yelled "Taser" three times, the trigger she squeezed was that of her pistol. Daunte Wright, a Black 20-year old man, fell dead.

Mr. Wright had been stopped for a license plate issue. But when officers tried to arrest him on a gun-related warrant, he bolted for his car. That's when the 26-year year police veteran committed that rare but [not unheard-of](#) blunder. Honest mistake or not, the tragedy led Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar to insist that her colleagues pass the "[George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](#)." (It seeks, among other things, to ban chokeholds and end qualified immunity for police.) Senator Klobuchar also offered some pointed remarks at Mr. Wright's funeral. "True justice is not done as long as having expired tags means losing your life during a traffic stop," she said.

Ms. Potter and her chief [both resigned](#). They were soon joined by the city manager. Instead of murder, though, the former cop was charged with 2nd. degree manslaughter. If convicted she faces "only" ten years.

Let's subject Minneapolis to the same looking-glass we used for Columbus. Minneapolis also contributes to the [LexisNexis crime map](#). However, in 2019 it identified crime locations by neighborhood instead of ZIP code. There are eighty regular neighborhoods in the city. For each we obtained population and median household income data from the [Statistical Atlas of the United States](#). We used the latter (/1000) instead of poverty rates. Here's the scattergram:



Once again, the association between economic conditions and violence is crystal clear. As income increases aggravated assault rates literally plunge. (Thus the correlation statistic is negative, meaning that the “variables” move in opposite directions.) We also compared the five Minneapolis neighborhoods at both extremes of the aggravated-assault scale. Here are the results, with place names abbreviated:

Five best (lowest) rates					Five worst (highest) rates				
NEIGH	POP	MEDIAN INCOME	2019 AGG ASLTS	AGG ASLT RATE	NEIGH	POP	MEDIAN INCOME	2019 AGG ASLTS	AGG ASLT RATE
FIELD	2366	99.1	0	0	WEBC	5097	30	73	1432.2
HALE	3176	113.7	0	0	FOLWL	5344	35.9	89	1665.4
KENNY	3559	103.5	0	0	NEARN	5962	31	102	1710.8
TANGLT	4351	110	1	23	DWW	5781	63.3	126	2179.6
KEEWY	3096	86.4	1	32.3	HAWT	4207	26.9	123	2923.7
Mean =		102.5	0.4	11.1	Mean =		37.4	102.6	1982.3

Again, the link between poverty and violence is readily apparent. As we harped about in “[Repeat After Us](#),” when it comes to assessing crime city names *are* meaningless. It’s really *places* that count.

So what’s the takeaway? Given the vagaries of both officer and citizen temperament, counting on cops to de-escalate and do all the “right” things while working under the uncertain, often threatening conditions of the “real world” is a tall order. Think you can do better? Start off with inadequate resources and a lack of information. Add a heady portion of citizen non-compliance, substance abuse and personal issues. And by all means stir in some inappropriate behavior by colleagues and [superiors](#) who want to do

things “their” way (remember, um, Chauvin?) *Voila!* You’ve cooked up the toxic brew that even well-meaning cops (and these are in the vast majority) consume each day. Enjoy!

Law-abiding citizens who endure the everyday violence and gangsterism that accompanies poverty have been speaking out. In the aftermath of the [police killing of Adam Toledo](#), a thirteen-year old resident of Chicago’s impoverished “[Little Village](#)” neighborhood (household median income \$31.5K), a deeply-researched story [in the Tribune](#) featured the sentiments of residents who were fed up, and not just with the police:

- Seventy-four year old sidewalk vendor: “We are tired of gang violence; it’s sad what happened with the young boy, but he had a gun with him and his friend had been shooting, so the officer responded to the threat.”
- Thirty-eight year old man doing his laundry: “We can’t even go out safely because there are random shootings everywhere and you never know if a stray bullet might hit you.”
- Fifty-nine year old grandmother (she tries to keep away from gang members *and* cops): “The only reason people are talking about (killings) now is that it was a police officer who shot and killed the kid.”

To be sure, the craft of policing can always improve. But poverty and the things that come with poverty can make even “routine” policing exasperating. As we recently noted in “[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)” and “[Human Renewal](#),” making a *real* difference would require a concerted effort to provide needy areas with resources and services that might prevent the next Adam Toledo from running around with an armed gang-member at one in the morning. That calls for major investments in child care, tutoring, job training, apprenticeships, health care and housing. And yes, it would be expensive, and yes, residents of better-off areas might complain.

But look at those faces. Ma’Khia Bryant, Adam Toledo and Daunte Wright were clearly troubled souls. Each could have used some quality social, educational and health supports far earlier in life. But here we are, in the supposedly enlightened twenty-first century, and we still ignore the profound, life-shattering consequences of being raised in poverty. And when cops dealing with these intractable issues misstep, as they sooner or later will, it’s once again time to levy discipline, crank up the rules and turn out those massive studies and reports.

Sound familiar?

Posted 5/26/16

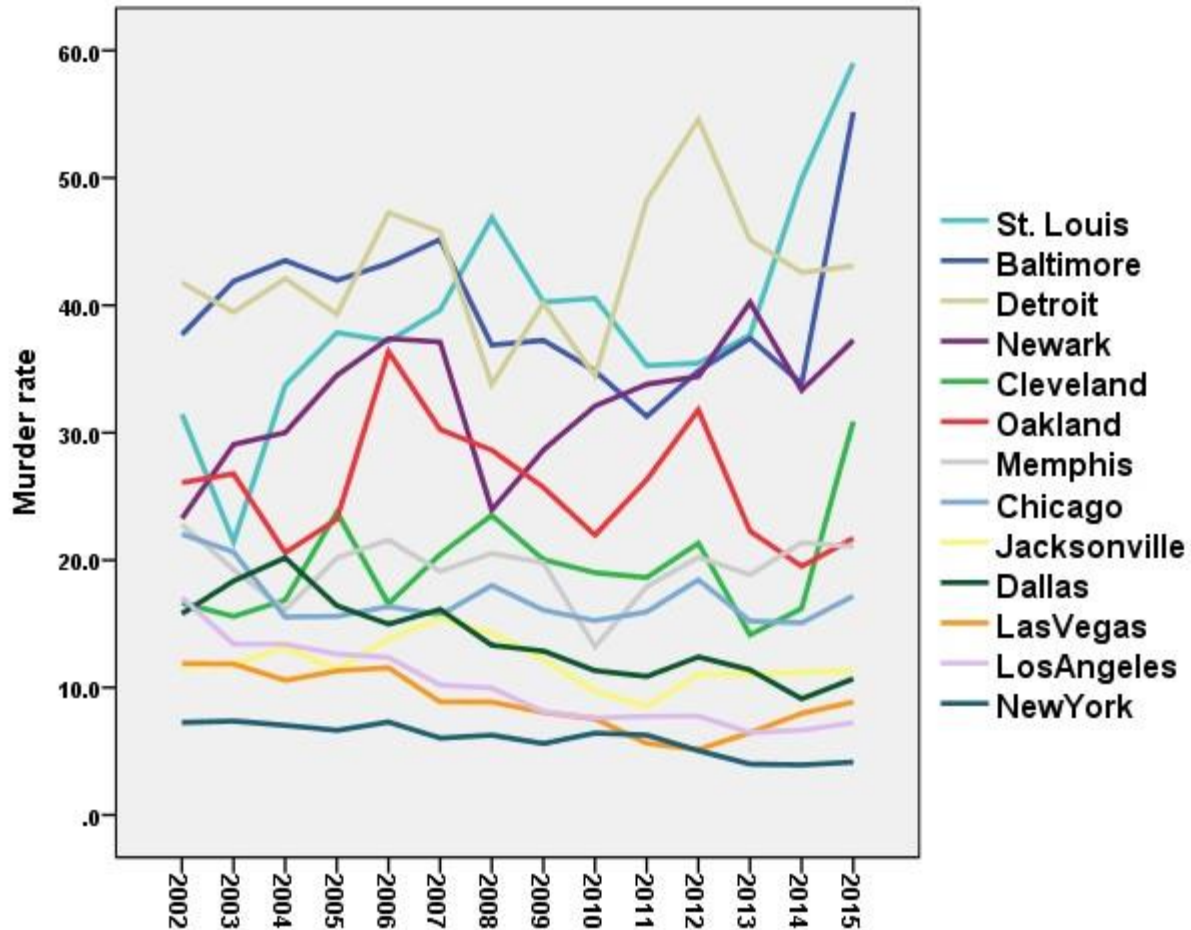
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Crime happens. To find out why, look to where.

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. A few weeks ago [we blogged about Chicago's ongoing struggle](#) with violent crime. And it's not just the Windy City that's been having a lousy year. [Data gathered](#) from sixty-three police departments and sheriff's offices by the Major Chiefs Association reveals that half (31) experienced more homicides in the first quarter of 2016 than during the equivalent period in 2015. Some of the increases were substantial. Murders in Las Vegas went from 22 to 40, an 82 percent gain. Other winners (or, more properly, losers) include Dallas (26 to 45, +73 percent), Jacksonville (18 to 30, +67 percent), Newark (15 to 24, +60 percent), Memphis (31 to 48, +55 percent), Nashville (13 to 20, +54 percent), San Antonio (23 to 34, +48 percent), and Los Angeles (55 to 73, +33 percent).

Still, the trophy properly belongs to Chicago. Although its increase wasn't the greatest percentage-wise – the Windy City came in third, at +70 – it dwarfed its competitors in raw numbers, going from 83 homicides during 1Q 2015 to a stunning 141 for 1Q 2016. Overall, [more folks are meeting a violent demise](#) in the City of Broad Shoulders (509 in 2012; 422 in 2013; 427 in 2014; 465 in 2015) than anywhere else in the U.S. (We'll spare readers Chicago's other nicknames. Perhaps these sobering facts might suggest one that's more – um – *contemporary*.)

On the other hand, if we're interested in murder *rates* Chicago is a distant contender. This graph uses data from the [Brennan Center](#), [St. Louis police](#), [U.S. census](#) and the [UCR](#) to compare murders per 100,000 population for thirteen major cities since 2002. (Our focus is on murder because felonious assault data seems far less trustworthy. For more on this see "[Cooking the Books](#)" and "[Liars Figure](#)".)



And the winner (meaning, loser) is St. Louis! It earns the gold for 188 killings, which yielded a breath-taking rate of 59.6 murders per 100,000 population. Baltimore, at 55.2, got the silver and Detroit, at 43.8, the bronze. Chicago – its comparatively measly rate was 17.0 – only came in eighth.

Yet the news wasn't all bad. During 2002-2014 New York City's murder rate fell from 7.3 to 3.9. (It ticked up a bit in 2015, ending at 4.2.) Los Angeles wasn't too far behind. Although it started out far higher, at 17.1, by 2013 its rate had dropped to 6.5. Murder rates have rebounded in the last couple of years, but L.A.'s uptick was relatively marginal, to 6.7 in 2014 and 7.2 in 2015.

So, New York is very safe, and Los Angeles isn't far behind. Right?

Not so fast. Each release of the Uniform Crime Reports is accompanied by a prominent warning against using crime statistics to rank jurisdictions. [Here's](#) the most recent:

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Each year when Crime in the United States is published, many entities—news media, tourism agencies, and other groups with an interest in crime in our nation—use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rankings, however, are merely a quick choice made by the data user; they provide no insight into the many variables that mold the crime in a particular town, city, county, state, region, or other jurisdiction. Consequently, these rankings lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting cities and counties, along with their residents.

“Simplistic” or not, once the stat’s come out there’s no holding back the media. In late 2015, only days after release of the UCR’s 2014 installment, the [Detroit News](#) prominently ranked the top ten murder cities, leaving any implications to the reader. Comparisons – essentially, rankings under another name – are commonplace. Two weeks ago, in an otherwise well-documented piece entitled “Homicide Rates Jump in Many Major U.S. Cities, New Data Shows,” the [New York Times](#) gloated that the Big Apple was nothing like Chicago:

Still, more than 50 people were shot in Chicago last weekend, making it among the most violent weekends in months. At the other end of the spectrum was New York City, where homicides fell in the first three months of the year to 68 from 85 in the same period last year.

Respectable police organizations also get in the game. True enough, [the above-mentioned report](#) published by the major cities police chiefs avoids direct comparisons by listing cities alphabetically and providing crime counts instead of rates. Except that the chiefs just couldn’t help themselves: jurisdictions where crime increased are highlighted in red.

What gets lost in the discord about ranking is that cities are political constructs. Crime, on the other hand, is a social phenomenon, with its roots in neighborhoods. Commenting on the recent upswing in murder, Professor Richard Berk [makes the point succinctly](#):

Those homicides are not randomly distributed...Crime, like politics, is local. This stuff all occurs in neighborhoods on much more local levels....It’s not about a city as a whole, it’s about neighborhoods.

Alas, the professor’s enlightened comments were buried in an article that – you guessed it – was replete with rankings. Still, his concerns about place were echoed by Eddie Johnson, Chicago’s weary police commissioner, who attributed the increased

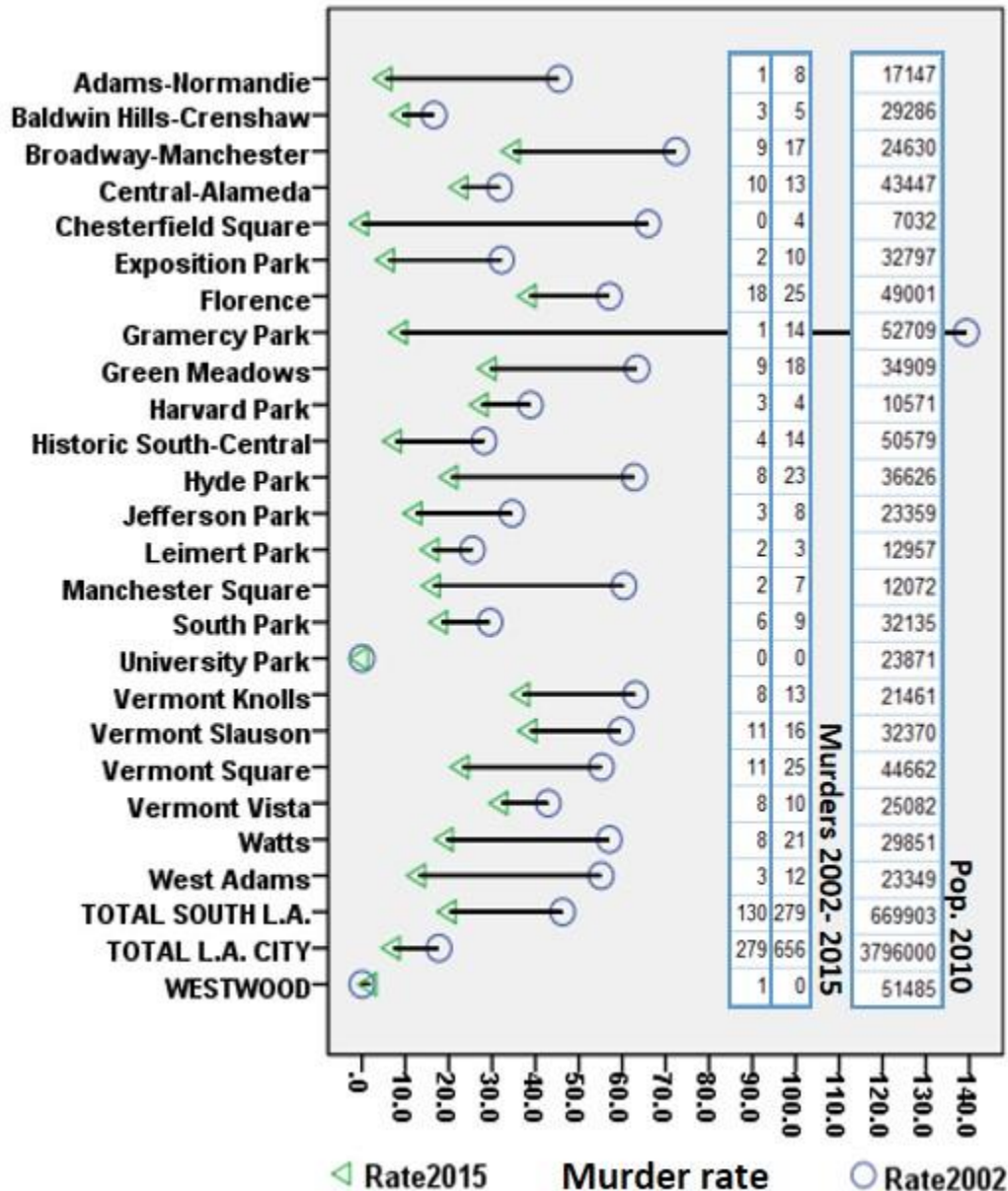
violence to a coterie of well-known criminals who were running amok in certain parts of the city.

That's what another top cop had to say about his burg a few days ago. Interviewed about Los Angeles's recent rebound in homicide, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck hastened to point out that only 427 Angelinos have been shot so far in 2016, while 1,400 were plugged during this period in...Chicago! [But his analysis of L.A.'s increase seems much the same](#):

We took some extreme steps to address the four most violent divisions earlier in the year, and those steps are starting to have some effect. Although it's not over 'til it's over, obviously.

Your blogger spent his teens in a middle-class neighborhood on Los Angeles' west side. His only experience with violence was what he heard on the radio or saw on T.V. Of course, he and his friends steered clear of notoriously violent areas such as South L.A. Two decades later, when your blogger returned to L.A. as an ATF supervisor, he got to experience South L.A.'s crime problems first-hand. He'll always remember that early morning when one of the fed-up local residents walked up and thanked him as agents led a notorious evil-doer away.

What can we learn from neighborhoods? The [Los Angeles Times](#) has been mapping murders in the L.A. metropolitan area since 2000. This graph compares rates for neighborhoods in the incorporated areas of South Los Angeles during 2002-2015:



During 2002-2015, the aggregate neighborhood murder rate (“Total South L.A.”) plunged 56 percent, from 46.2 to 20.2, while the rate for the City of Los Angeles fell 59 percent, from 17.8 to 7.3. L.A.’s starting rate was more than two points lower than South L.A.’s ending rate, and wound up being less than one-third South L.A.’s. Westwood, a trendy area where your blogger’s family occasionally shopped and dined, had zero murders in 2012 and one in 2015. Your blogger’s neighborhood, West Hollywood (2010 pop. 34,426), went from 2 murders in 2002 to one in 2015.

Many L.A. neighborhoods have always been safe, others not so much. Although homicide seems to be on the decline, places such as Broadway-Manchester, Central-

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Alameda, Florence, Vermont Knolls, Vermont Slauson, and Vermont Square are stubbornly resisting the trend. Each is likely to have counterparts elsewhere, and for the same reasons. Say, Chicago.

Cops and criminologists know that place matters. “[Hot-spots](#)” policing, the popular strategy that targets locations in need of special attention, is a computerized version of last century’s old-fashioned pin maps. Sociological interest in neighborhoods dates back to at least the “[Chicago School](#).” And inquiries into place continue. In a compelling new study, researchers sampled census blocks in ten cities to investigate the effects of voluntary organizations on neighborhood crime rates. [Their report](#) appears in the current issue of *Criminology*.

What’s important is to escape the trap of the usual suspect: poverty. Really, most poor people aren’t crooks. Geographically coding crimes and potentially enlightening variables – for example, the presence of violent cliques – might help explain why some disadvantaged neighborhoods fare worse than others. Unfortunately, that’s where movement lags. At present, thirty-three states participate in the [National Incident-Based Reporting System](#). A joint effort of the FBI and Bureau of Justice Statistics, it supplants the stodgy old UCR, which mostly aggregates numbers of offenses and arrests. Unfortunately, while the NIBRS captures information about place, crime locations [are only coded by type](#) (e.g., residence, bar, office building).

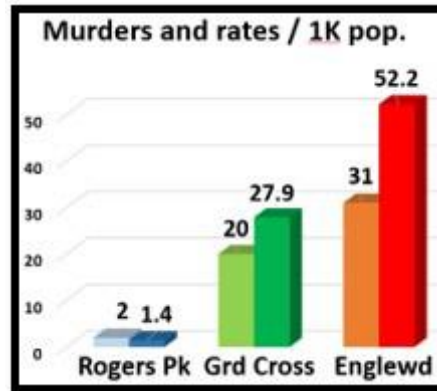
To help agencies take the next step, the [National Institute of Justice](#) offers a comprehensive set of mapping and analytical tools. Some departments have been geocoding incidents, publishing maps and even making data available online (click [here](#) for Philadelphia PD’s version.) Geocoded crime data is also offered by private firms and public organizations (the *L.A. Times* “Homicide Report” was used for this piece.) And while its coverage is somewhat dated, the [National Archive of Criminal Justice Data](#) offers data that can be drilled down to ZIP codes, census tracts and block groups.

Hopefully one day all crime will be geocoded. Until then, we should keep in mind that political subdivisions like Los Angeles and Chicago are mostly creatures of the imagination. Just like in real estate, it really *is* all about location.

Posted 7/25/22

MASSACRES, IN SLOW-MO

Poor Chicagoans complain that their massacre never ends



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Here's what a middle-aged resident of Chicago's Grand Crossing area [recently had to say](#) about violence in his neighborhood:

We're ignored here. Kids get shot here — they throw them in the bag and keep on going. But they got the whole SWAT team out there in Highland Park trying to get the bottom of this sh--.

"J.R." was referring to the full-bore police response, including cops from Chicago, to the recent Fourth of July massacre, when a troubled youth armed with an assault rifle opened fire during a parade in nearby Highland Park, gunning down seven spectators and wounding more than two-dozen. Situated twenty-seven miles north of Chicago, the prosperous small city (pop. about 30,000) [boasts a median household income of \\$147,067](#). That's more than twice Chicago's \$62,097 and a full five *five times* [Grand Crossing's abysmal \\$30,110](#).

He wasn't the only Chicagoan to feel aggrieved. In crime-stricken Englewood (median income \$22,228), a neighborhood's self-described "Big Mama" despaired of a solution. "They have a lot of resources there in Highland Park. Our babies see people get shot while they're at a playground, and there's no counseling. They have to suck it up and deal with it." She was referring to the recent gunning down of a man by a nearby playground. And, not long before that, to the young man who ran into her yard, bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound.

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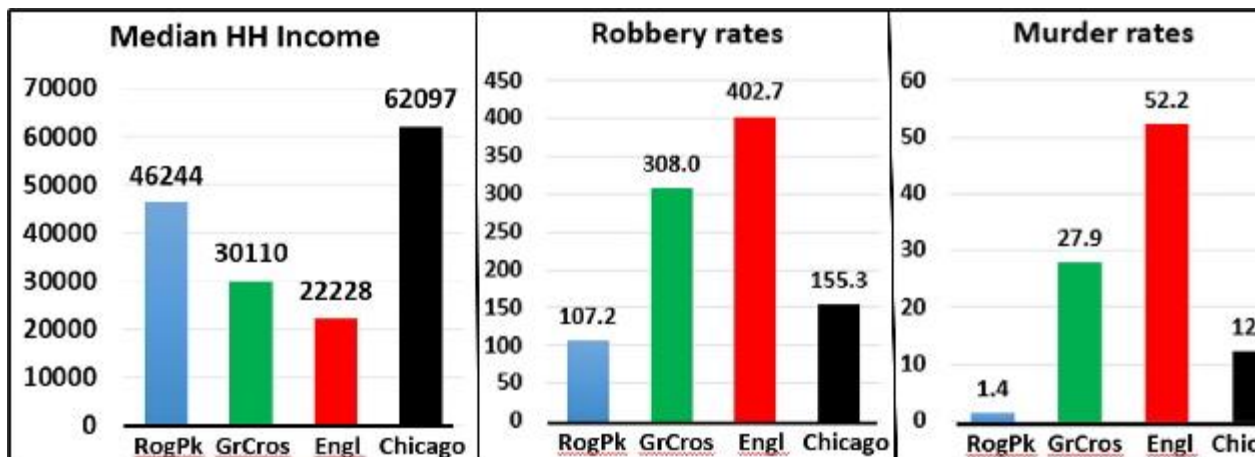
A post-massacre, in-depth [Chicago Tribune piece](#) about Highland Park mentioned the city's affluence. And, as well, a resident's annoyance that it mattered:

'Affluent' has all sorts of meanings. Besides, who cares how rich people are if they're being shot at? They're people. It suggests we're protected from the world. Plus, we're not fancy! There are little, teeny homes here, too!

There was also blowback *after* the piece was published. [One letter-writer complained](#) that "it's not the time (if ever there is one) to talk about the haves and have-nots of a community still reeling from the horrific events of July Fourth."

Indeed, the mayhem that took place within the span of a few moments has left a scar on Highland Park and its citizens that may never heal. We're certain that neither "J.R." nor "Big Mama" harbor ill will against the distraught community. But they are clearly frustrated with the perceived official neglect – and the all-too-visible consequences of that neglect – that they and their neighbors supposedly endure day-in and day-out because of poverty.

We've never felt that poverty "causes" crime and violence. But it's definitely associated with the factors that do. Over the last decade-plus, essays in our "[Neighborhoods](#)" special topic have probed this connection. Invariably, we've found that crime, violence and economic conditions are tightly linked. In "[The Usual Victims](#)" we compared 2019 and 2020 murder rates for Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City, and, within each, between one low-poverty and one high-poverty neighborhood. As one might expect, Chicago's notorious Englewood area, where 46 percent were poor, endured a murder rate *seventeen times* that of relatively benign Rogers Park, where "only" 26 percent of residents were poor.



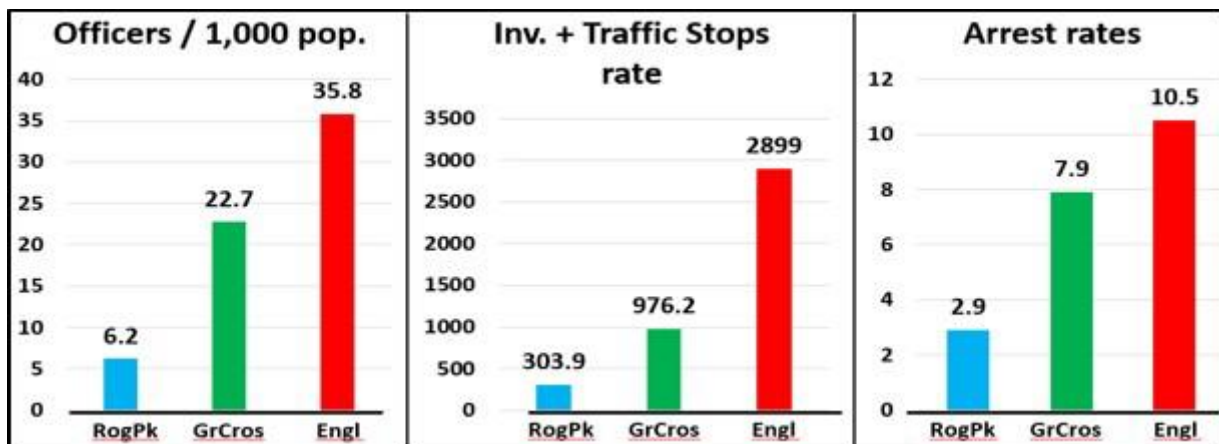
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	Dist	Pop	Robberies	Murders
<u>RogPk</u>	24	138,941	149	2
<u>GrCros</u>	3	71,742	221	20
<u>Engl</u>	7	59,346	239	31
Chicago		2,171,197	4189	334

That disparity has persisted. Check out these charts, which depict 2022 data for Rogers Park (blue), Grand Crossing (green), Englewood (red), and Chicago overall (black). Median household income for each neighborhood is from [a recent Chicago planning report](#). Robbery and murder rates (per 100,000 pop.) reflect offenses committed between January 1 and July 10, 2022 and were computed using [CPD crime data](#) and district populations in a [Chicago IG report](#).

It's the same old story: lower incomes, higher rates of violent crime. Check out our lead graph. Grand Crossing's (J.R.'s area) raw murder count, 20, is a stunning *ten times* that of Rogers Park, which has nearly twice the population but suffered "only" two criminal homicides. Grand Crossing's murder rate is *twenty times* that of Rogers Park and *more than twice* Chicago's overall. And look at those robbery numbers! It's not surprising that some citizens of Grand Crossing wonder where all that help went.

So *what about* that "help"? Here the situation's less clear. We downloaded 2017 Chicago police division staffing data from the [Citizens Police Data Project](#), 2017-2020 [stop data from the Chicago I.G.](#), and 2022 arrest data (thru July 10) from the [CPD statistics portal](#). Each rate was calculated per 1,000 residents of the corresponding police district.



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	Dist	Pop	Ofc	Inv Stops	Tfc Stops	Both	Arrests
RogPk	24	138,941	864	11282	30937	42219	396
GrCros	3	71,742	1632	12233	57798	70031	565
Engl	7	59,346	2126	32439	139601	172040	625

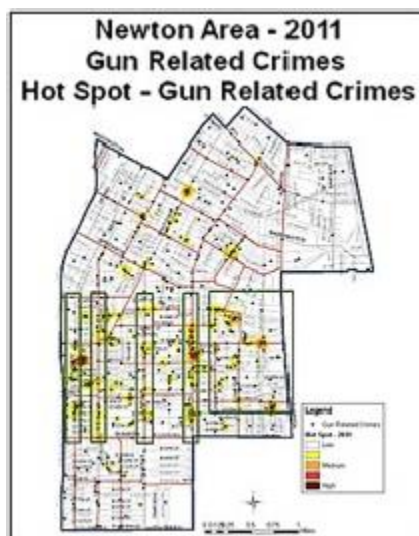
Deployment isn't simply a matter of population size. Officer strength reflects differences in district crime rates. Although District 7's (Englewood) population is *less than half* District 24's (Rogers Park), it reportedly had *more than twice* as many cops. And as one would expect, more cops means lots more stops and arrests. Englewood officers cumulatively made about *four times* as many stops as their colleagues in Rogers Park and 1.6 times as many arrests.

Chicago's cops have a substantially greater presence and act far more proactively in crime-beset neighborhoods. Their efforts seem a version of the "[Geographically Focused](#)" and "[Hot Spots](#)" strategies that NIJ and academic researchers (e.g., "[Hot-spots policing and crime reduction](#)") have repeatedly praised. As we mentioned in "[Driven to Fail](#)," these approaches have tamped down violent misbehavior in many places.

Bottom line: CPD is *not* ignoring crime-stricken neighborhoods. Yet considering the violence that residents of places like Grand Crossing and Englewood endure, their irritation is easy to understand. What to do? Maybe particularly beset areas could use more cops. Or maybe we could get the ones already there to "crank things up."

Clearly, either approach could pose big problems. Englewood and Grand Crossing already enjoy disproportionate numbers of cops. Pulling officers from other areas might easily lead to more crime in those districts. As for increased hiring, that may also be out of reach. Even if there's money for salaries, suitable candidates are proving hard to find. Cities across the U.S. have been losing officers, and Chicago's numbers are presently

"[the lowest in recent history](#)". About 350 of its cops retired in 2018, and [nearly twice that number](#) – more than 660 – retired in 2021.



What about increasing the productivity of officers already on the job? Consider "LASER," LAPD's 2009 hot-spots incarnation. A product of its "[Smart Policing Initiative](#)," LASER targeted known offenders and graced high-crime areas with intensive patrol ("[Driven to Fail](#)"). And it seemed very effective. Problem is, high-crime areas tend to be poor and disproportionately populated by persons of color. Even if cops try to be careful, racial and ethnic disparities in stops, searches and arrests

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seem inevitable. Add in pressures to do more, and you’ve [“A Recipe for Disaster”](#). By 2019 an accumulation of frustration over the allegedly abusive treatment of Black citizens in LASER areas led a “shouting, overflow crowd of about 100 protesters flaunting ‘LASER KILLS’ signs” – the very residents of the community cops were supposedly trying to help – to demand the program end.

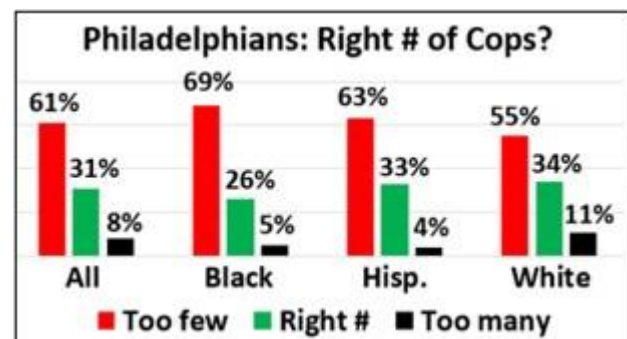
Lower-income Chicagoans aren’t the only Americans who feel frustrated over their perceived abandonment by city hall. Let’s dial it back three years. Here’s what a resident of a poor, violence-plagued Baltimore neighborhood had to say about her visit to a “well-off area”:

The lighting was so bright. People had scooters. They had bikes. They had babies in strollers. And I said: ‘What city is this? This is not Baltimore City.’ Because if you go up to Martin Luther King Boulevard we’re all bolted in our homes, we’re locked down. All any of us want is equal protection.

But how did Baltimore’s policing *get* “unequal”? In April 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year old Baltimore resident with a criminal record, [ran from officers performing enhanced patrol](#) in a poor, crime-ridden area. He was caught, arrested for carrying a switchblade, and placed in a police transport van. Handcuffed but otherwise unsecured, Mr. Gray tumbled in the van during his careless transport and [was fatally injured](#). State prosecutors filed (ultimately, unsuccessful) charges against the six cops involved, and [DOJ opened an inquiry](#) into the agency’s practices (click [here](#) for the findings).

Reacting to their slapdown, Baltimore cops [staged a prolonged “slowdown”](#). They sharply curtailed self-initiated activity, and stops of suspicious cars and pedestrians plunged. As the (interim) Chief described it, “in all candor, officers are not as aggressive as they once were...” And yes, there were consequences. As our tables in [“Police Slowdowns”](#) illustrate, Baltimore killings skyrocketed, and stayed high.

As the last decade came to an end, negative public reaction to alleged racial profiling and police abuse (e.g., [the killing of George Floyd](#)) led agencies throughout the U.S. to dial things back. Then, perfectly timed, came the pandemic. Unrestrained by aggressive strategies such as hot-spots, crime and violence soared. So did concerns about personal safety. [According to a recent Pew poll](#) “70% of Philadelphians see crime, drugs, and public safety as the most important issue facing the city—up nearly 30 percentage points from 2020”. At 44%,



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the proportion who reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods is the lowest since 2009. And although only 32 percent of Blacks believe that police treat them equally, *a full sixty-nine percent* (the largest proportion by race) feel there are *too few* cops.

Well, more cops may be out of reach. But in reaction to what seems our “new normal,” three major burg’s: [Los Angeles, New York City and Chicago](#) brought back hot-spots policing. For a closer look at Chicago’s approach check out its District Strategic Plans (click [here](#) for District 3, [here](#) for District 7, and [here](#) for District 24). Each sets out priority locations and details the manner of intervention. For example, here is the “enforcement response” for an area identified as “Howard Street, between Greenview and Clark” in relatively benign District 24 (Rogers Park):

Focus enforcement efforts and missions on Howard Street where gang members are known to loiter; drink on the public way, and sell narcotics. Conduct gang and narcotics dispersals and issue ANOV’s (our note: citations), while creating a greater sense of safety on Howard Street.

In dangerous District 7 (Englewood), where “opposing gang factions are in conflict with each other to expand their territories” and shootings frequently happen, problem areas get special resources. Here is one example:

Conduct missions with Beat and Tactical cars to resolve conflicts. POD (our note: fixed observation cameras) <https://home.chicagopolice.org/inside-cpd/police-observation-device-pod-cameras/> and traffic missions to assist in those efforts. Community Safety Team (CST) to assist with enforcement. District Intelligence Officers (DIO’s) will continue to gather intelligence on gang factions & claimed territories.

We’re quite confident that Chicago is *not* ignoring its most imperiled citizens. High-crime districts get lots of extra help. Problem is, the frequent episodes of violence endemic to these areas tie up squads of officers for prolonged periods. Trying to maintain adequate patrol coverage by stuffing beset precincts with extra troops has its limits.

So what’s left? That takes us back to the dilemma that pervades our “Neighborhoods” posts: [cops can’t correct what most needs fixing!](#) So what *can*? 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,

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tutoring, educational opportunities, language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing could yield vast benefits.

We'll untangle another problem in a couple of weeks. Stay tuned!

Posted 4/13/19

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

***Inner-city violence calls for a lot more than cops.
Is America up to the task?***

For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. On April 3 the *Chicago Sun-Times* [trumpeted some very good news](#) for residents of the city's embattled Tenth precinct. Officially known as the [Ogden District](#), the area comprises two neighborhoods, [North Lawndale](#) and [South Lawndale](#) (aka "Little Village"), which have suffered from far more than their share of violence. But things may be getting better in the dangerous Tenth. Compared to the [forty-three shootings and eight deaths](#) that its denizens endured during the first quarter of 2018, this year's toll of twenty-one shootings and three fatalities, an improvement of over fifty percent, is substantially steeper than [Chicago's citywide decline](#), from 461 shootings and 117 deaths in FQ 2018 to 391 shootings and 93 deaths this year.

What's behind the Tenth's improvement? Most of the comments in the *Sun-Times* news piece credit the cops. According to a police captain, the gains are a product of "partnerships between police and community leaders, predictive analytics, the operational strategy...and the execution of that plan by the district's officers." A local alderman happily concurred. "They [officers] are out here with outdoor roll calls in the summer. They're at block clubs. They're doing the things that the community wants to see and the reason that the numbers are down is because of them."

Time to celebrate? Maybe not, cautioned the [Los Angeles Times](#). On the one hand, violence in Chicago has abated somewhat, with murders falling from 770 in 2016 to 660 in 2017 and 561 in 2018 (FBI counts are 765 in [2016](#) and 653 in [2017](#)). More cops, a sharp increase in gun seizures, and the use of gunshot-detection sensors and data-driven analytics that predict where crime is likely to occur may have contributed to the drop. Chicago's inner-city neighborhoods, though, experienced proportionately few benefits. In 2017, even as violence was down citywide, [the Tenth](#) nonetheless posted an appalling 44 homicides. Its murder rate of 28.3/100,000 pop. (see note below) was considerably higher than [Chicago's](#) (653 murders, pop. 2,706,171, rate 24.1), which was (and remains) in far worse shape than the relatively peaceful burg's of Los Angeles (281 murders, pop. 4,007,147, rate 7.0) and New York City (292 murders, pop. 8,616,333, rate 3.4).

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And the Tenth wasn't the worst example. Consider Chicago's notorious [Seventh police district](#), aka "[Englewood](#)." In 2017 its homicide rate (48 murders, pop. 42,969, rate 111.7) was *four times* the Tenth's. (In 2016, at the peak of the violence, the Seventh's 86 homicides yielded a truly astronomical rate of 200.1.) At present the Seventh [is again heading in the wrong direction](#), with ten killings during the first quarter of 2019 in comparison with eight last year.

Of course, not all of Chicago is in dire straits. Consider, for example, its wealthy [North Center](#) area, pop. 30,493, [with zero homicides](#) in 2016 and 2017. (For the ten best neighborhoods in Chicago, click [here](#)).

In "[Location, Location, Location](#)" we argued that it really *is* all about neighborhoods. Thanks to a surfeit of the poor, high-violence kind, the Windy City regularly produces more killings than Los Angeles and New York City combined. That's not to say that Hollywoodland and Gotham should be popping corks. While their overall crime rates are consistently lower than Chicago's, each has its own intractably violent areas as well. (For more about that click [here](#) and [here](#).)

So where does one go from here? First, we must abandon the notion that fine-tuning the police response or "cranking things up" can solve the problems created by crime and violence. Even the most sophisticated law enforcement strategies can only go so far. LAPD's "[Chronic Offender](#)" program massaged data to identify supposedly dangerous characters, then placed officers on their tail. Unfortunately, the real world intruded, and seventy percent of the time the allegedly active evil-doers were nowhere to be found (p. 18). And there was another problem. As our posts (most recently, "[Driven to Fail](#)") have warned, the interplay between poverty, race and ethnicity means that aggressive strategies such as stop-and-frisk inevitably produce buckets-full of "false positives" in minority-rich areas. That, as LAPD learned, can lead to a lot of anger and discord. It's why the program [recently collapsed](#).

Well, how does one truly "fix" places like the Tenth, the Seventh, South L.A. and the Bronx? That's what the renowned [Urban Institute](#) addressed in a landmark study, "[Tackling Persistent Poverty in Distressed Urban Neighborhoods](#)." Its authors issued recommendations in five areas:

- Education and child care: quality education, quality child care, enrichment opportunities, summertime activities
- Crime and violence: less of both!

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- Personal and environmental health: physical and mental health services, affordable, quality food, safe play areas and public spaces
- Neighborhood efficacy: supportive neighborhood environment, including caring for each other's children, collective ability to lobby and secure external resources
- Expanded economic opportunities: job training, apprenticeships, adult education, summer jobs, transportation to opportunities elsewhere

Let's focus on our favorite: economic opportunities. What would it take to improve the poor's access to legitimate sources of income? In brief, an awful lot. [Jobs-Plus](#) is perhaps the best known national example. A partnership between the Feds and major private foundations, the program provides employment opportunities, job training and financial incentives to residents of public housing projects in thirteen States. Its goal: to create "a culture of work." Its cost: since 2015, [\\$63 million from HUD](#). (Jobs-Plus initiatives are funded by multiple public and private sources. Click [here](#) for a current list.)



We could go on, but the point's been made. Truly reforming Chicago's Tenth, or the Seventh, or South Los Angeles or the Bronx would require massive infusions of time, labor and capital. Such as our President "trump-eted" during his campaign (remember his promise of a "[New Deal for black America?](#)"). That nothing happened is no surprise. In addition to their cost and complexity, programs that seek to substantially improve the quality of life in our afflicted inner cities carry a lot of ideological baggage. Where, for example, should one draw the line between "help" and "handout"? It's no surprise that despite well-meaning efforts such as LBJ's "[Great Society](#)" the promises of urban renewal have always far outweighed their reality.

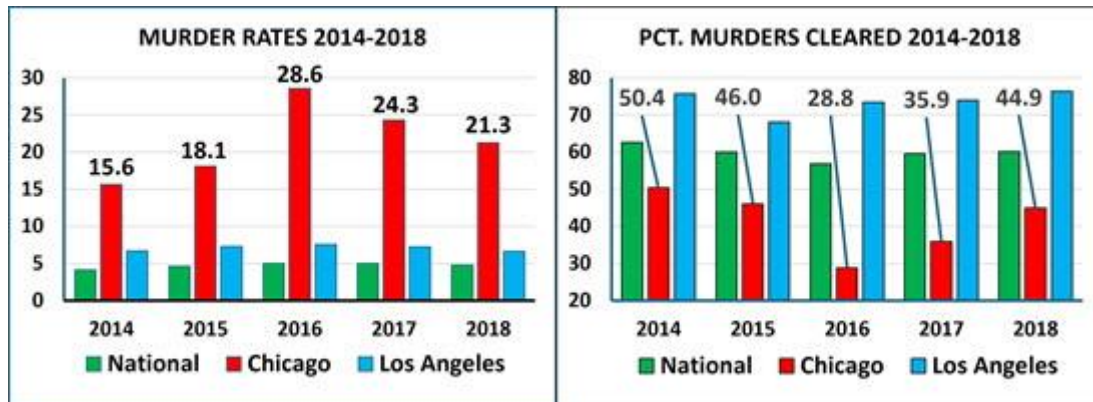
As our [Strategy and Tactics](#) posts demonstrate, *Police Issues* is definitely not of the mind that law enforcement can't (or shouldn't be) improved. Really, when compared to initiatives such as Jobs-Plus, fine-tuning the police seems like a cakewalk. That may explain why we habitually dump society's problems on the cops. And why our grandkids' grandkids will still be dealing with the poverty and violence of our inner cities.

Unless, of course, climate change gets us first. Oops, sorry. Wrong pulpit!

Posted 6/22/25

MORE POVERTY, LESS TRUST

Citizens who most need the cops trust them the least



For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Our lead graphic uses UCR and NIBRS data published by the [Murder Accountability Project](#) to illustrate Chicago's long-standing problem with crime, and particularly of the violent kind. In 2018, the "windy city's" chronically high murder rate and abysmally low solution drove its leaders to ask the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) to probe things and offer advice. Was there anything that could realistically be done?

Funded in part by a Federal grant, a team of specialists spent a year reviewing Chicago PD's investigative practices, analyzing its material and personnel resources, examining examples of past casework, and interviewing detectives and staff members. A detailed assessment offering eighty-nine specific recommendations was delivered in 2019. Best we can tell, that tome wasn't publicly released. But on April 24, 2025 CPD posted an [87-page report](#) that "highlights instrumental changes the Department has made to align with recommendations in key areas of staffing, organizational structure, oversight, training, policies and procedures, and equipment and technology." Readers get a step-by-step tour of just what the beset agency's done to implement PERF's recommendations.

Has it helped? Check out our updated version of the graphics:



In 2023, four years into the re-do, the city’s murder rates were nearly one-quarter (23.9 percent) worse than in 2019. And the percent of homicides cleared correspondingly plunged. While 2024 clearance rates aren’t yet in, [Chicago PD reported](#) 573 murders in 2024, yielding a per/100,000 homicide rate of 21.1. That’s a bit “improved” from 2023 but still *way* beyond the pale.

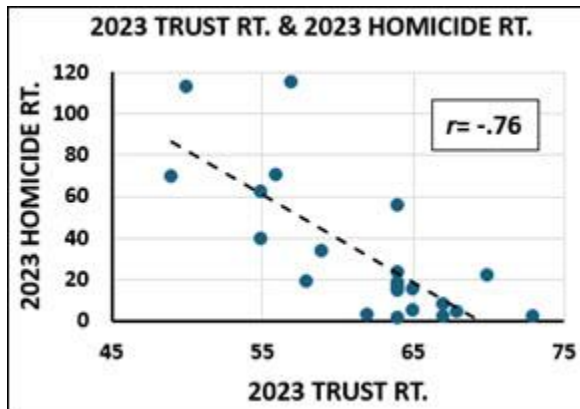
Chicago PD’s report doesn’t get into the “numbers.” But it does offer abundant praise for PERF’s team, without whom “the Department and Bureau of Detectives could not have advanced as rapidly and successfully in implementing these reforms to homicide investigations.”

Job done, right? Well, not so fast. “I get that they’re understaffed. But at the same time, where’s my justice?” That lament was recently conveyed to the [Chicago Sun-Times](#) by a rideshare driver who was shot and seriously wounded during a 2021 robbery. That “understaffing” (and its consequences) also catches heat from the cops. Here’s what a retired detective had to say. “In some districts, in the summer, you might be getting five or seven shooting cases a week. Even if you wanted to run down every case like [it was] a murder, there’s just no time to do it....”

According to the *Sun-Times*, compared to L.A., only half as many of Chicago’s cops are detectives. That shortage of investigators supposedly contributes to poor solution rates and high levels of crime. Indeed, increasing the number of detectives was a key element of PERF’s plan. Chief Ursitti told reporters earlier this year that a team of detectives had recently been formed to specialize in shooting investigations, and that the unit’s size would expand.

To be sure, more detectives can prove useful. Detailed sweeps of crime scenes and the execution of search warrants and such can yield valuable evidence. But there’s no substitute for having citizens promptly alert police when things go astray. Witness testimony is always crucial, and picking out evildoers from a lineup can’t be done by a

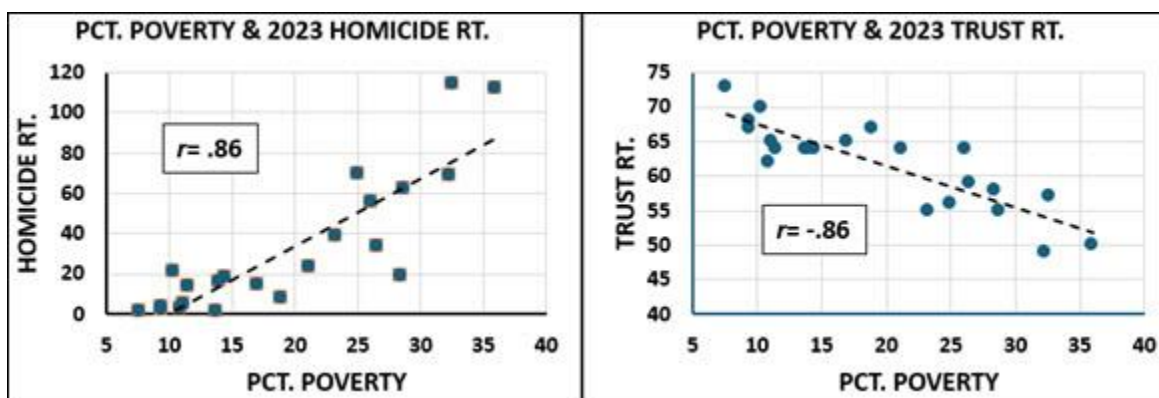
machine. Of course, Chicago well knows that citizen cooperation is key. In fact, during 2018-2023 [the city paid a private firm to survey citizens](#) about their feelings of safety and, just as importantly, of their trust in the police.



Might how citizens feel about cops affect their peace-keepers' end product? We used the r correlation statistic to assess the relationship between the trust that residents expressed in the police, district by district, and [homicide rates per 100,000 pop.](#) (trust data is from 2023, the most recent year available.) The r scale ranges from zero, meaning no relationship between measures ("variables") to one, meaning that they move

in lockstep. Here the outcome, $r = -.76$, suggests that trust and homicide are strongly linked. It's negative: as scores for one increase, scores for the other decrease. Grab a look. Each district is a "dot." Those on the low end of the trust scale (left side) have mostly high homicide rates, while those at the high end of the trust scale (right side) mostly enjoy low homicide rates.

Point made? Well, not so fast. Problem is, that seemingly strong statistical relationship between trust and homicide, which is consistent with the former's role as a "cause" of the latter, may have actually been produced by a third factor with which both measures are strongly associated. Indeed, whenever the "effect" is violent crime, we've always turned to poverty as the likely suspect.



Check the scattergram on the left. Poverty's relationship with homicide yields a pronounced r of .86: as poverty goes up, so do murders, and nearly in lockstep. What's more, the relationship between poverty and trust (right graphic) is also very strong.

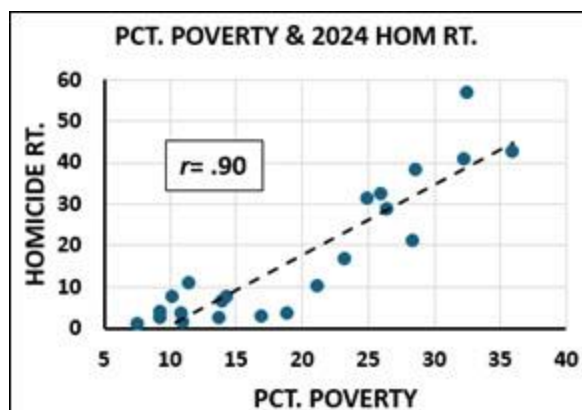
At $r = -.86$ it's (coincidentally) of the same magnitude but negative, meaning that as poverty increases, trust systematically declines.

Poverty is strongly associated with both homicide and trust. Might that exaggerate the magnitude of trust's seeming relationship with homicide? To find out we turned to "partial correlation," a technique that strips away the influence of a third variable from a two-way relationship. Here's the result:

ORIGINAL CORRELATIONS			
	TRUST	HOM	POV
TRUST		-0.76	-0.86
HOM	-0.76		0.86
POV	-0.86	0.86	

PARTIAL CORRELATIONS			
	TRUST	HOM	POV
TRUST		-0.08	-0.62
HOM	-0.08		0.62
POV	-0.62	0.62	

- Trust and homicide: Trust and homicide (left table) have a strong r of $-.76$. But when the influence of *poverty* is removed (right table), their relationship plunges to a measly $-.08$. It literally disappears.
- Poverty and homicide: When the influence of *trust* is removed, the relationship between poverty and homicide drops from a weighty $.86$ (left table) to a lesser but still substantial $.62$ (right table.)
- Poverty and trust: When the influence of *homicide* is removed, the relationship between poverty and trust drops from $-.86$ (left table) to a still-substantial $-.62$ (right table).



Lack of trust in the police might well be another of poverty's unholy effects. But put trust aside for the moment. Homicide-wise, poverty clearly has the leading role. And in Chicago, its effects may have become even more pronounced last year. This scattergram compares percent in poverty and 2024 district homicide rates. Look at those dots! (again, each is a district.) This time the relationship between poverty and homicide

produces an r of $.90$, only inches away from a "perfect" 1.0 . (Note: According to a [CPD news release](#), homicides fell from 620 in 2023 to 573 in 2024. Our district-by-district count using the city's "[crime dashboard](#)" produced 586 homicides for 2024. So that's the number we used. Thankfully, it's only a small difference. Alas, there were no trust scores for 2024. But that's for another day!)

Back to trust. According to the [Sun-Times](#), “Chicago police have a low level of trust among the public, particularly in communities where most shootings happen.” Its probe discovered that “about 1,500 nonfatal shootings since 2018 were dropped because the victims of those shootings didn’t want to help with the investigation.” Bottom line: poverty and homicide really *are* that proverbial “horse and carriage.” And trust is clearly along for the ride. Problem is, residents of stricken areas know full well that calling in the “Mounties” could easily place them – and their families – at grave personal risk. So *of course* they’d think twice before helping the cops.

Is that frustrating? Ask the rideshare driver.

What can be done? Tweaking police deployment and such might help. But don’t expect miracles. As we’ve often argued, what’s really needed is a socio-economic transformation of poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Here’s an outtake from “[Let’s Stop Pretending](#)”:

To be sure, the craft of policing can always improve. But poverty and the things that come with poverty can make even “routine” policing exasperating. As we recently noted in “[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)” and “[Human Renewal](#),” making a *real* difference would require a concerted effort to provide needy areas with resources and services that might prevent the next Adam Toledo from running around with an armed gang-member at one in the morning. That calls for major investments in child care, tutoring, job training, apprenticeships, health care and housing. And yes, it would be expensive, and yes, residents of better-off areas might complain.

What can *you* do? Pass it on!

Posted 2/29/20

PLACE MATTERS

Desperate to avoid controversy, politicians avoid the obvious

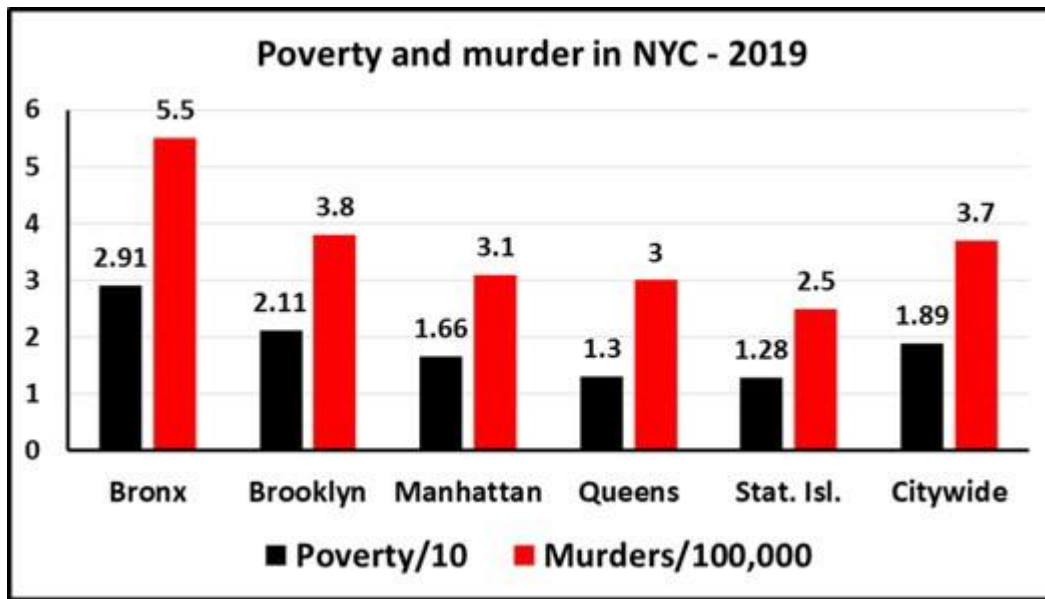
For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Let's begin with a memorable quote:

Ninety-five percent of your murders – murderers and murder victims – fit one M.O. You can just take the description, Xerox it and pass it out to all the cops. They are male; minorities 16 to 25. That's true in New York, that's true in virtually every city....

Mind you, that's not *Police Issues'* point of view. It is (*was?*) Michael Bloomberg's. [A video](#) of his speech at the [Aspen Institute's](#) 2015 annual get-together for the well-to-do and connected depicts the former Wall Street magnate, three-term NYC Mayor (2002-2013) and self-funded Presidential wannabe saying lots of things he would one day regret.

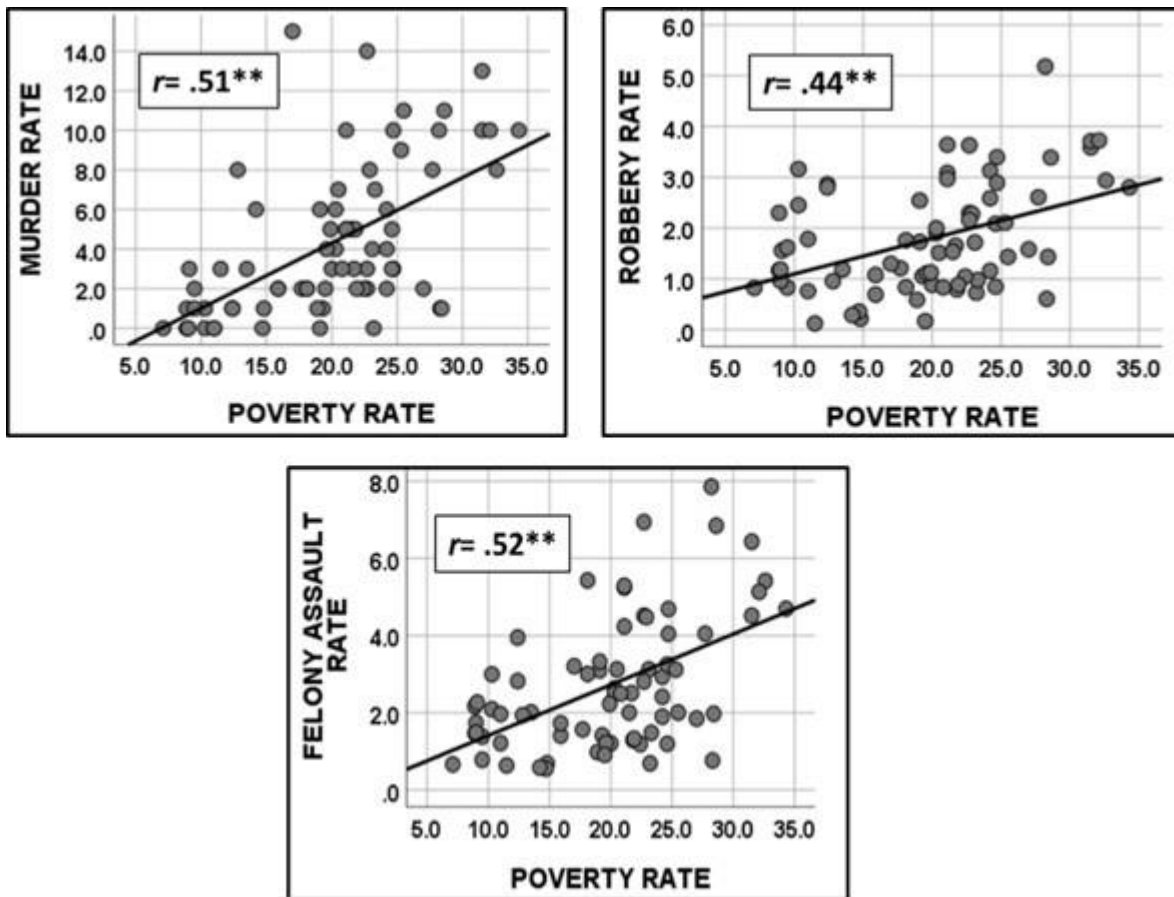
Well, that's politics! Still, are “ninety-five percent” of the Big Apple's murders – and *murderers* – *really* cut from the same cloth? We've looked into crime in Gotham in some detail. “[Be Careful What You Brag About](#)” (Part II) compared ten low-poverty and ten high-poverty NYPD precincts. As one might expect, their murder and robbery rates were very much different, and in the anticipated direction. New York City's high-crime areas, we concluded, “aren't in the Big Apple” – they're part of that other, disadvantaged America where our nation's minorities disproportionately reside.

Nothing's come up since then to change our minds. According to the most recent [Census estimate](#), New York City's poverty rate is 18.9%. But there are huge differences within. *Twenty-nine percent* of the residents of the Bronx, the least prosperous of the city's five boroughs, are poor. Might that affect murder?



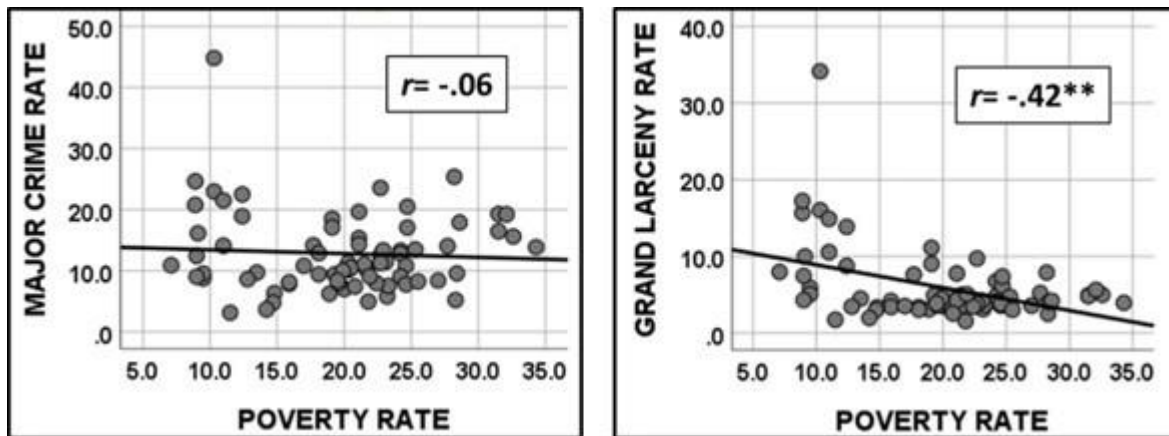
New York City [reported 310 murders](#) for 2019. Seventy-nine – about one in four – took place in the Bronx. With a population slightly over 1.4 million, the city’s most poverty-stricken area also posted its worst murder rate, 5.49 per 100,000. Every other borough – Brooklyn (pop. 2.6 million, 100 murders), Manhattan (pop. 1.6 million, 50 murders), Queens (pop. 2.3 million, 69 murders), and Staten Island (pop. 470,000, 12 murders) – followed in lock-step fashion. As poverty receded, so did homicide.

Poverty influences crimes other than murder. Using [precinct populations](#) and NYPD’s [recently posted 2019 data](#) for seven major crimes (murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny, and grand larceny of a motor vehicle) we computed murder, robbery and felony assault rates for 73 of the city’s 77 police districts (precincts 14, 22, 41 and 121 were omitted for methodological reasons.) Correlation analysis (the “*r*” statistic) was then applied to assess the relationship between each of these crimes and poverty.



Each dot represents a precinct. As one might expect, murder, robbery and felony assault had positive, statistically significant (i.e., meaningful) relationships with poverty. By “positive” we mean that the rates – say, poverty and murder – went up and down together. By “significant” we mean that the statistical procedure generated two asterisks, indicating a probability of less than one in one-hundred that a coefficient, such as .51, was produced by chance. As for the magnitude of the coefficients, r ’s can range from zero (no relationship) to one (strongest relationship.) In practice, those produced are indeed substantial.

What about the other index offenses? Check out these graphs:



Perhaps surprisingly, there's virtually no relationship between poverty and the aggregate measure, the major crime rate. Here's why. Grand Larceny was by far the category's most frequent offense. Its relationship with poverty was also strongly negative, meaning that as poverty went up, grand larceny went down. That makes sense. "Grand" larcenies require [a loss of \\$1,000 or more](#), making them far more commonplace in economically better-off places. New York City's profusion of grand larcenies countered the effects of violent crime, making its rate a misleading indicator of the relationship between crime and place.

So what did we learn? Citywide scores can seriously mislead. New York City, whose leaders habitually brag about low crime, posted [a 2018 murder rate](#) of 3.5/100,000 pop., handily beating the nation's 5.0 and, by substantial margins, [virtually every other city](#) of size. Indeed, when one considers Detroit's jaw-popping murder rate of 38.9, or Chicago's merely miserable 20.7, even the Bronx looks good. "[Location, Location, Location](#)" offered Los Angeles as another example of self-proclaimed success in the war against crime. After all, its 2015 murder rate was "only" 7.3 (N=279). Yet there were some startling exceptions within. Such as the bedraggled Florence neighborhood (Zip 90003, poverty rate 33.1%). With a population of 49,001, its eighteen homicides that year produced a murder rate of 36.7, *five times* the citywide figure. Still, neither Florence nor the Bronx managed to spoil their parents' triumph. Los Angeles and New York simply have so many prosperous residents that their aggregate poverty rates remain fetchingly low.

Of course, protective factors likely matter. With nearly eight and one-half million residents and an astounding [28,069 persons per square mile](#), the "Big Apple" is by far the largest and most densely populated of the nation's fifty major cities. Los Angeles, the runner-up in population, has half as many residents. Its density of 8,360, while on the high end nationally, is but a fraction of [Manhattan's](#) astonishing 69,467 inhabitants per

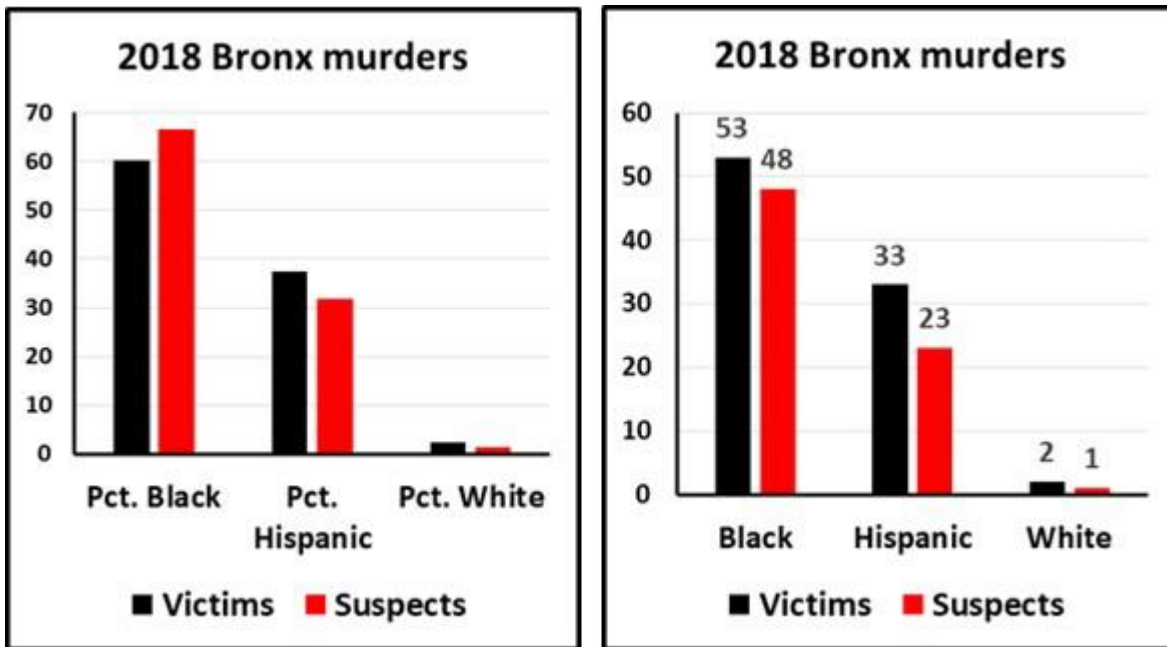
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square mile. How did the prosperous burg get there? By ensconcing its well-to-do residents in pricey, access-controlled high-rises. Bingo! Instant security, and likely one of the reasons why the borough's crime rates are low.

When it comes to crime, place isn't just critical for New York and Los Angeles. In "[Human Renewal](#)" we wrote about the far smaller community of South Bend, Indiana (pop. 103,869). Coincidentally, its former mayor, Pete Buttigieg, is also a Presidential candidate. South Bend police [posted data](#) for 346 "criminally assaulted shootings" between 2015-2018. (If the link isn't working we'll happily share our copy.) Using Census population and poverty figures, we computed a shooting rate for each of South Bend's ten Zip codes, then ran correlation analysis. Sure enough, the relationship between poverty and shootings was strong and positive ($r=.68^*$). More poverty, more violence.

No matter. None of the Presidential candidates – nor, with a single exception (see below) any other politician of note – is talking about neighborhoods. Our favorite remedy, a "Marshall Plan" for America's downtrodden places, isn't on the radar. (We've been pushing for it since, um, 2008. Click [here](#).) Perhaps they worry that focusing on place would bring in potentially controversial issues like race and ethnicity.

But we're not running for office. Let's return to the loser in New York City's poverty/murder sweepstakes: the Bronx. According to the [most recent Census estimate](#), blacks comprise thirty-six percent of its residents. Lamentably, more than one in four (26.7%) blacks who reside in the downtrodden borough live in poverty. And the consequences seem all too predictable.



According to NYPD's "[Supplementary Homicide Report](#)" for 1998, ninety-one of that year's 295 murders took place in the Bronx. Race and ethnicity were known for 88 victims and 72 assailants. These graphs (frequencies on the left, percentages on the right) depict the grim racial and ethnic distribution. Citywide, about one-third of New York City's residents are white. Yet according to the 2018 report, whites figured as either victim or suspect in *less than one in ten* homicides.

Place, and the money it takes to live in a nice place, really, *really* matter.

For a breath of fresh air, let's consider the views of a political figure who tells it like it *really* is. We're talking about the [Hon. Randall Woodfin](#), Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama. Conveying the view that a community "is only as strong as its lowest quality-of-life neighborhood," his recent "[State of the City](#)" speech described Birmingham's obstacles in a memorable (and remarkably candid) fashion:

In a city of 99 neighborhoods, 88 of them are majority black and 11 are majority white. Those 11 neighborhoods are the safest. Those 11 neighborhoods have the highest income, highest home property value. And in those other 88 neighborhoods that make up the fourth-blackest city in America, there's a 29% poverty rate. You dig deeper into that for single families, it's 43%. They don't have vehicles. The property value hasn't increased, unemployment is higher, and there's too much crime.

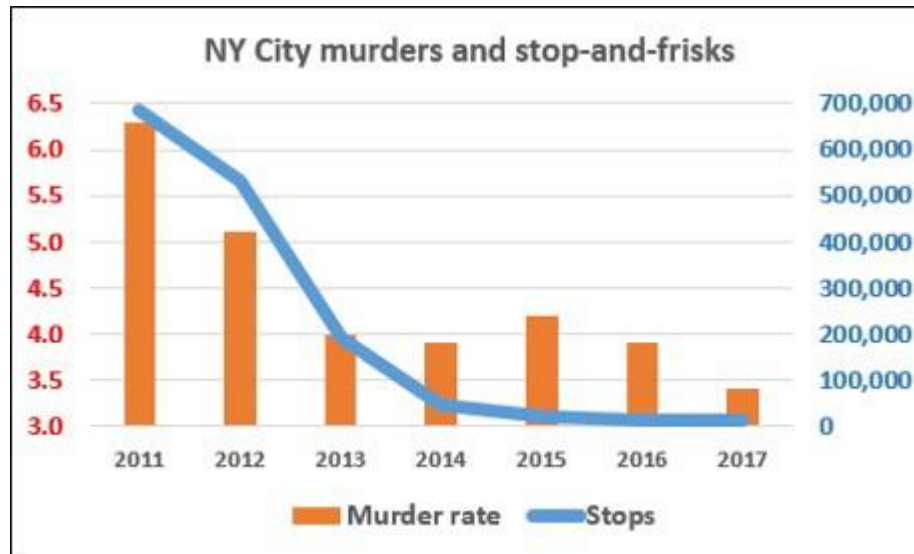
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Mayor Woodfin's solution, a multifaceted "neighborhood revitalization program," seems highly promising. Grab a ballot. We're writing him in!

Posted 8/4/18

POLICE SLOWDOWNS (PART II)

Cops can't fix what ails America's inner cities – and shouldn't try



By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. [Part I](#) concluded that sharp, purposeful reductions in discretionary police-citizen encounters probably increased violent crime in Baltimore, Chicago and Minneapolis. Here we'll start by considering the effects of work actions in two supposedly safer places: New York City and Los Angeles.

There are few better laboratories for assessing the effects of reducing officer activity than New York City, whose famous stop-and-frisk campaign [dates back to the early 2000's](#). As we reported in "[Location, Location, Location](#)" its lifespan coincided with a plunge in the city's murder rate, which fell from 7.3 in 2002 to 3.9 in 2014.

Glance at the chart, which displays data from [NYPD](#) and the UCR. Clearly, stop-and-frisk had become a *very* big part of being a cop. Officers made more than *six-hundred eight-five thousand* stops in 2011 (685,724, to be exact). We picked that year as a starting point because that's when adverse court decisions started coming in (for an in-depth account grab a coffee and click [here](#).) Still, the program continued, and there were a robust 532,911 stops in 2012. But in August 2013 a Federal judge ruled that NYPD's stop-and-frisk program [violated citizens' constitutional rights](#). Activity instantly plunged, and the year ended with "only" 191,851 stops. Then the bottom fell out. Stop-and-frisks receded to 45,787 in 2014, 22,563 in 2015, 12,404 in 2016 and 11,629 in 2017.

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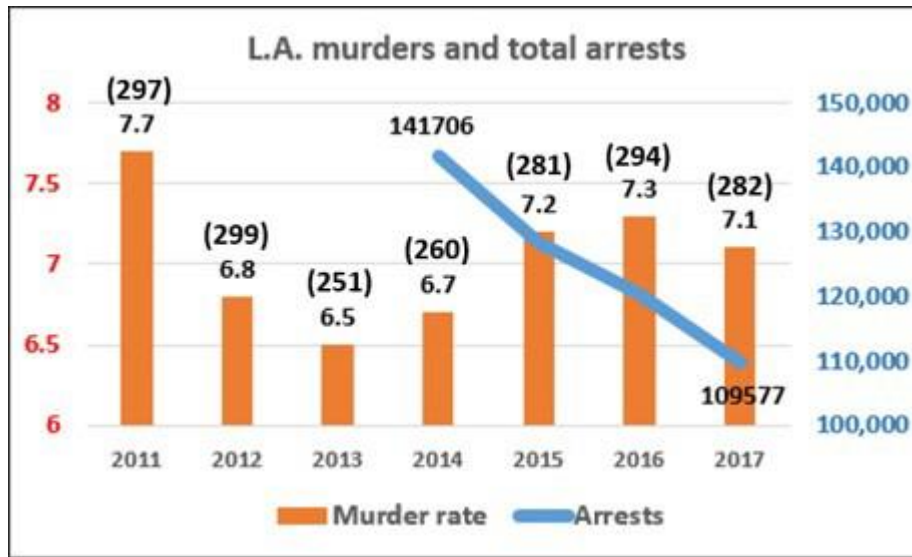
It wasn't just stop-and-frisks. Productivity was being impacted by other issues, most notably officer displeasure with Mayor Bill de Blasio, who openly blamed cops for the serious rift with the minority community caused by the tragic [July 2014 police killing of Eric Garner](#). Then things got worse. That December an angry ex-con [shot and killed](#) NYPD officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu as they sat in their patrol car. Officers quickly attributed his deranged act to the [hostile anti-cop atmosphere](#) supposedly being fostered by City Hall, then expressed their displeasure by going on a modified "strike". According to [NYPD statistics reviewed by the New York Post](#), arrests during December 2014 were down by sixty-six percent when compared to a year earlier, while tickets and the like plunged more than ninety percent. Although the magnitude of the slowdown soon receded, its effects reportedly persisted well into 2015.

On the whole, did less vigorous policing cause crime to increase? Look at the chart again. During 2011-2013 murders and stops declined at about the same rate. On its face that seems consistent with views expressed by some of the more "liberal" outlets, which concluded that doing less actually *reduced* crime – at least, of the reported kind (click [here](#) and [here](#)). But in 2014 the downtrend in killings markedly slowed, and in 2015, with stop-and-frisk on the ropes and officers angry at Hizzoner, murders increased. A study recently summarized on the NIJ [Crime Solutions](#) website concluded that, all in all, stop-and-frisk did play a role in reducing crime:

Overall, Weisburd and colleagues (2015)* found that Stop, Question, and Frisk (SQF) was associated with statistically significant decreases in the probability of nontraffic-related crime (including assault, drug-related crimes, weapon-related crimes, and theft) occurring at the street segment level in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Staten Island...SQFs did not have a statistically significant impact on nontraffic-related crime in Manhattan or Queens."

* David Weisburd, Alese Wooditch, Sarit Weisburd and Sue-Ming Yang, "Do Stop, Question, and Frisk Practices Deter Crime?" *Criminology and Public Policy*, 15(1):31–55 (2015).

Stop-and-frisk campaigns reportedly reduced crime in other places. For example, check out [Lowell, Mass.](#) and [Philadelphia](#). However, [our views on the practice](#) are mixed, and we'll have more to say about it later. For now let's move on to our last city, El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora, La Reina de Los Angeles:



L.A.'s murder rate initially followed the New York pattern, [plunging from 17.1 in 2002 to 6.5 in 2013](#). But L.A.'s tick-up has been considerably more substantial. That concerned the [Los Angeles Times](#), which reported that arrests paradoxically decreased by twenty-five percent between 2013 and 2015. "Field interviews" (the term includes stop-and-frisks) also supposedly dropped, and 154,000 fewer citations were written in 2015 than in 2014. Unfortunately, the *Times* didn't post its actual numbers on the web. Our tally, which uses data from the UCR and the [LAPD website](#), indicates that arrests declined 23 percent between 2014-2017, a period during which murders increased about six percent.

According to the *Times*, officers conceded that they had slowed down on purpose. Their reasons included public criticism of police overreach, lower staffing levels, and the enactment of [Proposition 47](#), which reduced many crimes to misdemeanors. And while the lessened activity led some public officials to fret, some observers thought that doing less might be a good thing:

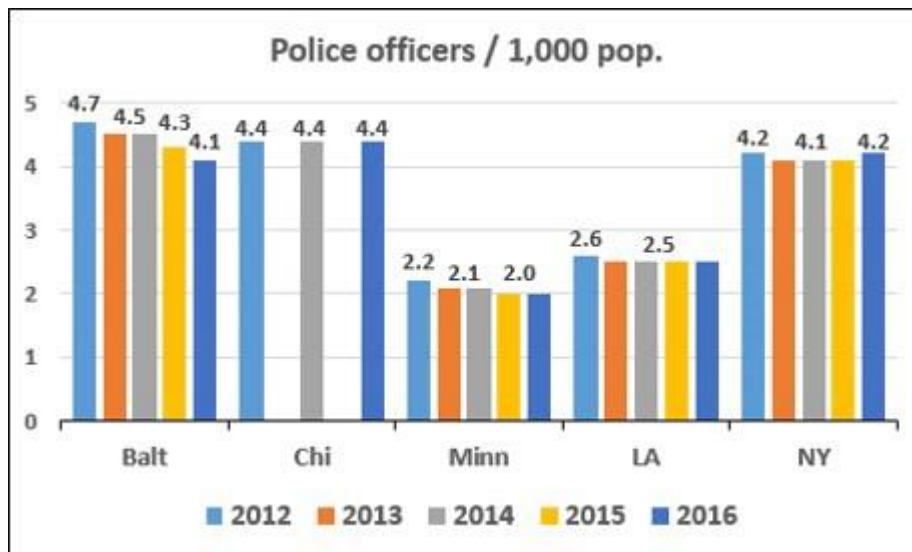
If police are more cautious about making arrests that might be controversial, making arrests that might elicit protests, then that is a victory. We want them to begin to check themselves.

Contrasting his vision of "modern policing" with the bad old days, when doing a good job was all about making lots of stops, searches and arrests, then-Chief Charlie Beck heartily agreed:

The only thing we cared about was how many arrests we made. I don't want them to care about that. I want them to care about how safe their community is and how healthy it is.

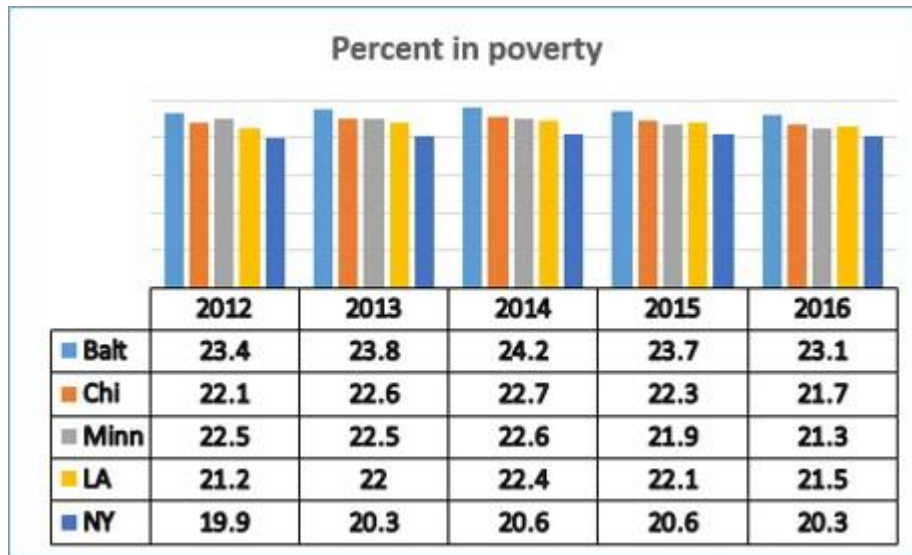
Well, that's fine. But it doesn't address the fact that twenty-one more human beings were murdered in 2015 than in 2014. Was the slowdown (or whatever one chooses to call it) responsible? While a definitive answer is out of reach, concerns that holding back might have cost innocent lives can't be easily dismissed.

Other than police activity, what enforcement-related variables can affect the incidence of crime? A frequently mentioned factor is police staffing, usually measured as number of officers per 1,000 population. Here is a chart based on data from the UCR:



LAPD staffing has always been on the low end. Its officer rate per thousand, though, held steady during the period in question. So did the rate for every other community in our example except Baltimore, where the officer rate steadily declined while homicides went *way* up (see [Part I](#)).

Forget cops. What about the economy?

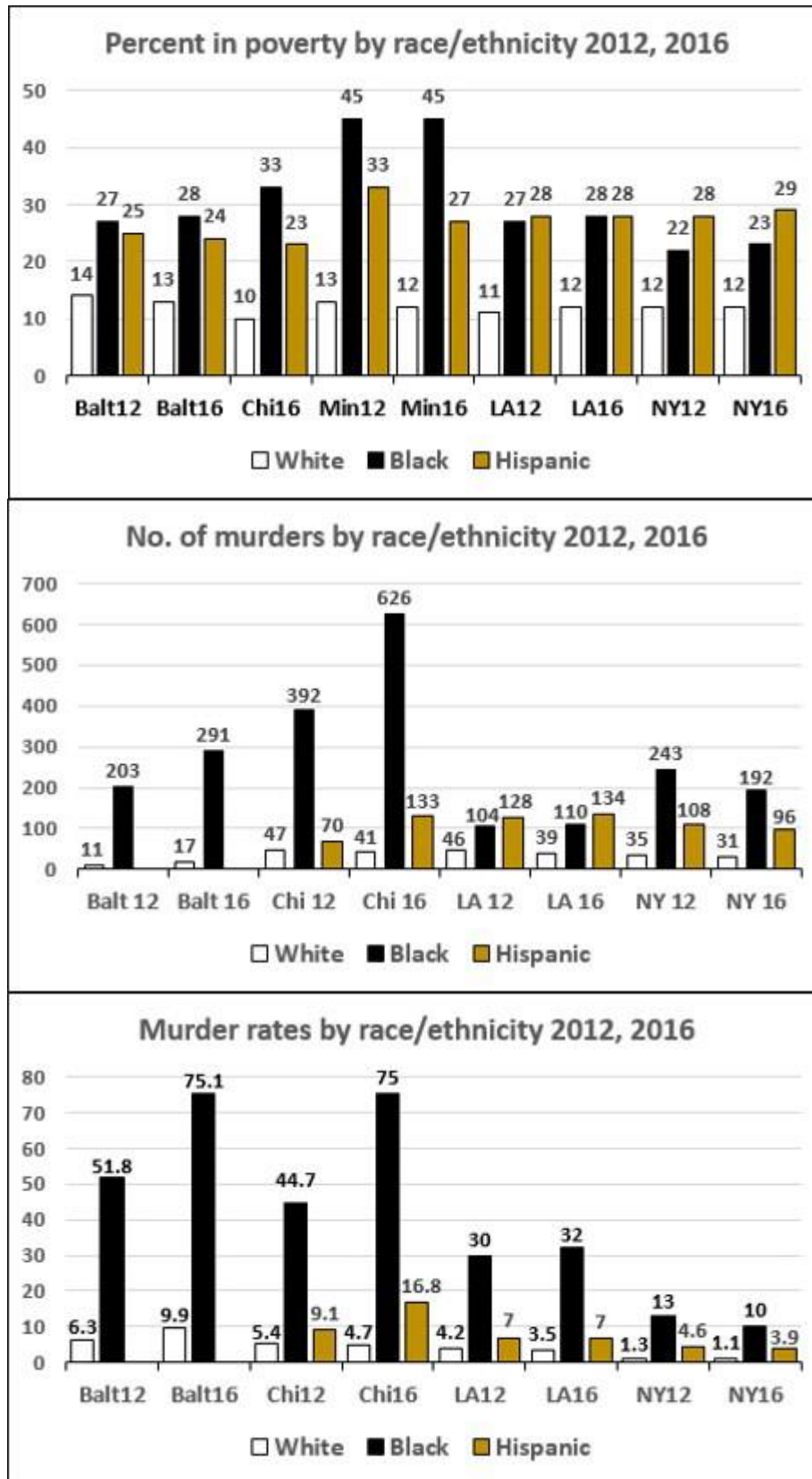


This graph, which uses [poverty data from the Census](#), indicate that the three high-crime burg's from [Part I](#) – Baltimore, Chicago and Minneapolis – have more poverty than the lower-crime communities of Los Angeles and New York. That's consistent with the poverty > crime hypothesis. On the other hand, within-city differences during the observed period seem slight. So blaming these fluctuations for observable changes in crime is probably out of reach.

Back to stop-and-frisk. Is aggressive policing a good thing? Not even *Crime Solutions* would go that far. After all, it's well known that New York City's stop-and-frisk debacle, which we explored in "[Too Much of a Good Thing?](#)" and "[Good Guy, Bad Guy, Black Guy \(Part II\)](#)", was brought on by a wildly overzealous program that wound up generating [massive numbers of "false positives"](#):

[During 2003-2013] NYPD stopped nearly six times as many blacks (2,885,857) as whites (492,391). Officers frisked 1,644,938 blacks (57 percent) and 211,728 whites (43 percent). About 49,348 blacks (3 percent) and 8,469 whites (4 percent) were caught with weapons or contraband. In other words, more than one and one-half million blacks were searched and caught with...nothing.

Keep in mind that aggressive policing doesn't happen in Beverly Hills. It happens in poor areas, because that's where violent crime takes its worst toll. NYPD officers most often frisked persons of color because they tended to reside in the economically deprived, high-crime areas that the well-intentioned but ill-fated policing campaign was meant to transform. These graphs illustrate the conundrum:



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In the end, turning to police for solutions to festering social problems is lose-lose. There are legal, practical and moral limits to what cops can or should be asked to accomplish. Saying that it's a "matter of balance" is too glib. Given the uncertainties of street encounters and variabilities in resources, skills and officer and citizen temperament, calibrating aggressive practices so that they avoid causing offense or serious harm is out of reach. It can't be done.

Correcting fundamental social problems isn't up to the police: it's a job for society. *Police Issues* is neither Red nor Blue, but when President Trump offered Charlotte's denizens a "[New Deal for Black America](#)" that would sharply increase public investment in the inner cities, [we cheered](#). Here's an extract from his speech:

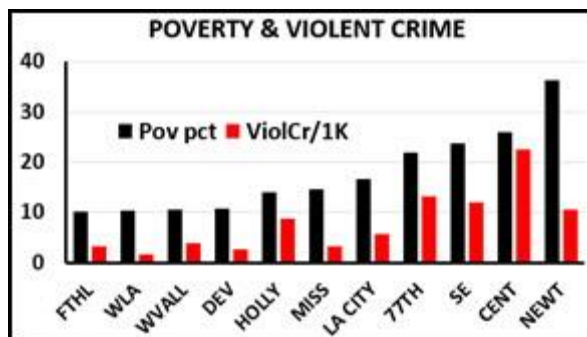
Our job is to make life more comfortable for the African-American parent who wants their kids to be able to safely walk the streets. Or the senior citizen waiting for a bus, or the young child walking home from school. For every one violent protester, there are a hundred moms and dads and kids on the same city block who just want to be able to sleep safely at night.

Those beautiful sentiments – that *promise* – was conveyed nearly two years ago. America's neglected inner-city residents are still waiting. And so are we.

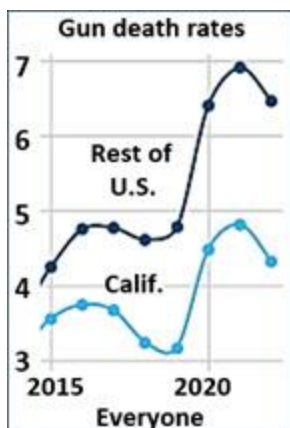
Posted 10/18/23

POLICING CAN'T FIX WHAT *REALLY* AILS

California's posturing overlooks a chronic issue

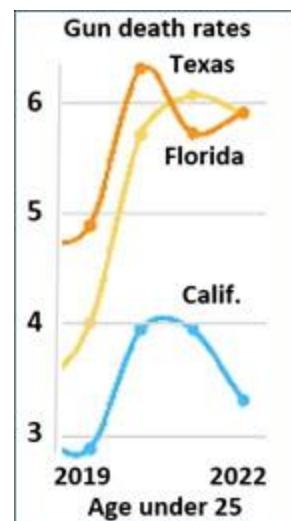


For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. two months ago Cal DOJ's Office of Gun Violent Prevention (OGVP) released "[The Impact of Gun Violence in California](#)." A data-rich thirty-seven page report, it sings the praises of the Golden State's achievements in reducing gun violence since the bad-old days of the nineteen-nineties. As those of us who then labored in the trenches well remember, that's when the crack epidemic beset our nation's inner cities and transformed south Los Angeles and its equivalents elsewhere into virtual combat zones.



But OGVP's bragging doesn't end there. California's more recent gun violence statistics draw prominent, highly favorable) mention. Pointing to [CDC Wonder's](#) firearms-related death data for 2013-2022, the report boasts that "if the firearm mortality rate in the rest of the U.S. matched California's over this same period, there would have been nearly 140,000 fewer firearm-related deaths across the nation in that decade alone, and potentially *hundreds*

of thousands fewer gunshot injuries" (p. 13, emphasis ours). Those views are bolstered by graphs based on per/100,000 gun death rates; one (see left) contrasts California with the U.S. overall (p. 10); another (see right) with the two other most populous states, Texas and Florida, for persons under 25 (p. 12).



What's behind California's comparatively benign gun-violence score? According to OGVP, aggressive enforcement, "affirmative litigation" and lawmaking play key roles. Authorities have taken firm measures to combat the proliferation of ghost guns, those unserialized instruments of death that can readily fall into the hands of unsavory characters and the underaged. "[Red Flag Laws](#)" enable family members, caregivers and police to seize guns from risky persons, including family members, before they strike. And prohibitions on lethal implements such as assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, which are often used to commit mass murder, have supposedly made the state "a leader in efforts to help intervene and prevent shootings before they occur."

And so on and so forth. It's not until page 32 of the 37-page report that attention shifts to the possible *causes* of gun violence. The focus is on race and gangs:

...in 2020-2021, the modal patient hospitalized for nonfatal gun assault injuries in California was a Hispanic or Black male in his 20's, admitted to the hospital on a weekend, hospitalized for over one week, and publicly insured through Medi-Cal...(p. 33)

...Researchers with the National Network for Safe Communities examined data from nearly two dozen cities across the U.S. and found that on average, at least half of homicides and 55% of nonfatal shootings in those cities were perpetrated by and/or against people known by law enforcement to be affiliated with gangs, "street groups," or social networks engaged in violence...(p.36)

We've often written about the well-known, thoroughly documented relationship between poverty and violence (see, most recently, "[Good News/Bad News](#)"). But OGVP's report doesn't use the words "poor" or "poverty" – not even once. "Income" comes up twice. Once at the beginning, where it's mentioned in passing that U.S. residents "are 25 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide than those living in other *high-income* countries" (p. 2, emphasis ours). And once near the end, where the authors note that "interpersonal gun violence disproportionately impacts people who have *lower income* and economic security" (p. 33, emphasis ours).

OGVP's report seems focused on praising California's response. Perhaps that's why it essentially ignores the socioeconomic factors that might actually "cause" firearms violence. We've emphasized poverty (POV), but other villains are likely involved. [Giffords](#), for example, ranks states according to gun law strength (GLS). [RAND](#) has collected data on rates of household firearms ownership (HFR), by state. Another possible influencer, law enforcement employee staffing (LEE), was one of the management measures gathered by the [UCR](#) (it's now transitioned to the [NIBRS](#)).

So we decided to run our own statewide analysis. Percent of persons in poverty by state (POV) is drawn from the [Census](#). Gifford's GLS is on a scale of 1-50 (strongest to weakest). For simplicity, we inverted it so that higher numbers mean stronger state gun laws. RAND's HFR [uses a scale](#) of zero (0) to one (1.0) to represent the proportion of adults in each state who reside in a household with at least one firearm. And LEE represents the ratio of law enforcement employees (sworn and non-sworn) per 1,000 population, by state, as reported by the UCR and NIBRS. (Note: Because the UCR-NIBRS transition remains a work in progress, our data for POV, GLS and LEE is for 2019, the UCR's last year. HFR gun ownership data represents 2016, when it was apparently last collected.

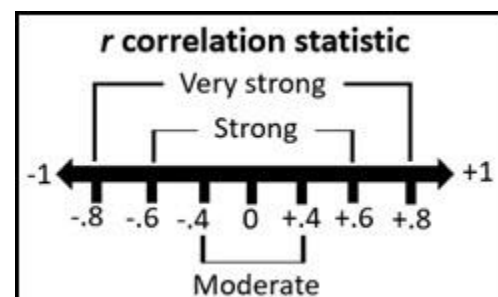
One possible influencer was left out. Unlike our other factors, which are on scales, "stand your ground" (SYG) laws are either in effect, or not. Their assessment is also complicated by the fact that they've come into play over time. But fear not – we recently addressed them in depth. For more on their possible role check out our recent piece, ["Fearful, Angry, Fuzzy-Headed. And Armed"](#).

	<i>r</i>	POV	GLS	HFR	LEE
Causes	POV		-0.39	0.31	0.14
	GLS	-0.39		-0.84	0.23
	HFR	0.31	-0.84		-0.34
	LEE	0.14	0.23	-0.34	
Effects	VIOL	0.46	-0.21	0.14	0.05
	HOM	0.68	-0.25	0.18	0.26
	ROB	0.22	0.35	-0.45	0.28
	AASLT	0.50	-0.30	0.24	0.04
	FADEATH	0.63	-0.73	0.75	-0.12
	FASUIC	0.30	-0.75	0.84	-0.38

This matrix displays data for all fifty states. Hypothesized "causes" are in the top box. There are four: POV (poverty), GLS (gun law strength), HFR (household firearms ownership) and LEE (law enforcement staffing). Six "effects" occupy the bottom box. Four are from the [2019 UCR](#): VIOL (violence rates), HOM (criminal homicide rates), ROB (robbery rates) and AASLT (aggravated assault rates). Each is a state rate per/100,000 pop.

and includes both gun and non-gun crimes. Two additional "effect" measures, FADEATH (gun deaths) and FASUIC (gun suicides) also denote state rates per/100,000 pop. Both are from [CDC Wonder](#).

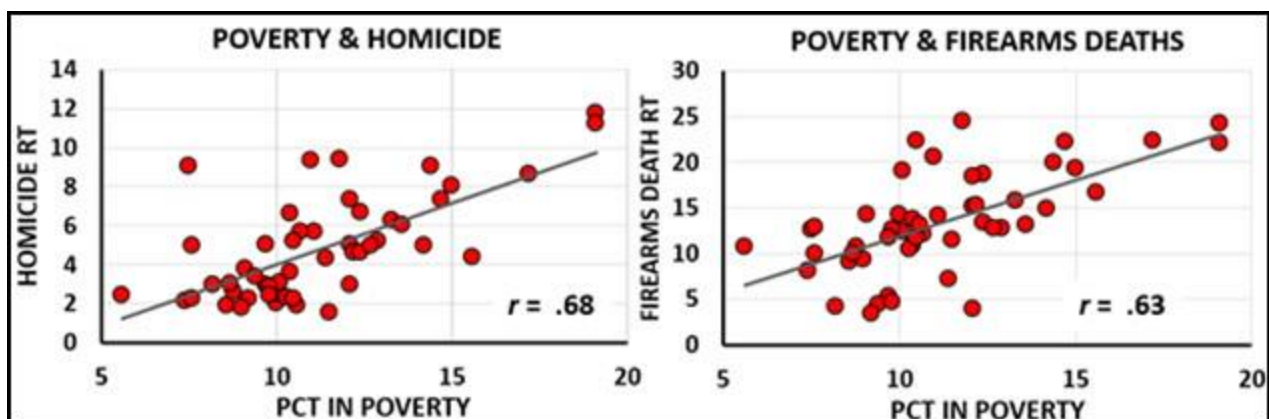
We use the "*r*" statistic to denote the relationships among the four causal variables, and between each causal variable and each effects variable. It's on a scale of -1 to +1. Positive *r*'s indicate that variable scores increase and decrease together; negative *r*'s, that they move in opposite directions. An *r* of zero (there are none) denotes



absolutely no relationship, while a “perfect” r of -1 or +1 (there are none) indicates a relationship in perfect lockstep. Relationships that are moderate ($r = 0.4-0.59$), strong ($r = 0.6-0.79$) and *very* strong ($r = 0.8$ & above) are in boldface. For example, go to the POV column. POV’s relationship with VIOL is a moderate 0.46, and its r with HOM is a strong 0.68. Shift to the HFR column. Grab a look at its very strong, 0.84 relationship with FASUIC. As one variable’s score increases or decreases so does the other’s, and in very close sync.

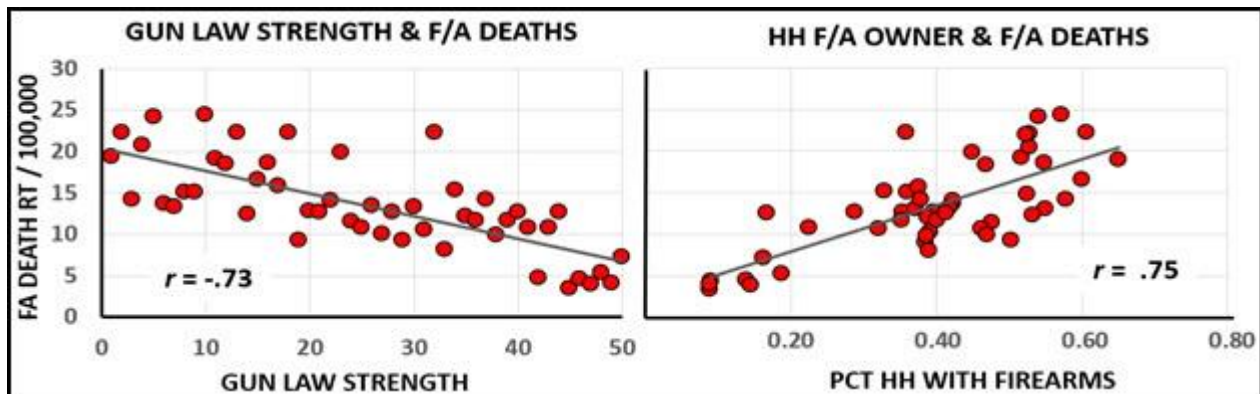
Let’s begin. We’ll take it one “effect” at a time.

- State violent crime rates (VIOL): Poverty has the only effect of note, an r of 0.46. Its sign is positive and the relationship is moderate, meaning that as percent of residents in poverty increases, violence rates also tend to get worse. Only “glitch” is that “violent crimes”, as defined by the UCR, include non-gun incidents. But the implication is clear: more poverty = more violence.
- State aggravated assault rates (AASLT): Poverty is the only causal variable with at least a moderate relationship. Again, it’s positive, meaning that aggravated assaults - which also include non-gun incidents - are more likely in poorer areas.
- State criminal homicide rates (HOM): Poverty is again the only causal variable of note. Its influence is evident in the left graph. The correlation, a strong r of 0.68, is “positive”, meaning that as the proportion of a state’s poor residents goes up, so do its homicide rates. Since guns are the most common way to accomplish murder, their role in the relationship seems assured.



- Firearm death rates (FADEATH): This effect variable, which specifically addresses gun deaths, has a strong relationship with poverty ($r = 0.63$, above right) and two other “causes”: state gun law strength and state household firearms ownership (see below). Note that the direction of the relationship

between GLS and FADEATH is “negative”: as gun laws get *stronger*, gun death rates *decrease*.



There is a little “glitch”. Our introductory matrix revealed that GLS and HFR are strongly correlated (-0.84). So we recomputed their individual relationships with FADEATH while “controlling” (removing) their partner’s possibly additive effects (below left). Sure enough, check out the r ’s circled in red. Once the counterpart’s influence is removed, those strong relationships that GLS (-0.73) and HFR (0.75) enjoyed with FADEATH now fall below the .40 threshold of moderate strength. On the other hand, poverty’s strong r of 0.63 with FADEATH is unaffected when HFR is removed from the picture, and remains a considerable 0.55 when the influence of GLS is taken out. Bottom line: poverty wields a big stick on its own, while GLS and HFR seem far more influential as a team.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FADEATH				
	ORIG r	CONTROLLING FOR:		
		POV	GLS	HFR
POV	0.63		0.55	0.63
GLS	-0.73	-0.68		-0.28
HFR	0.75	0.75	0.37	

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FASUIC				
	ORIG r	CONTROLLING FOR:		
		POV	GLS	HFR
POV	0.30		0.01	0.08
GLS	-0.75	-0.72		-0.15
HFR	0.84	0.82	0.59	

- Firearm suicide rates (FASUIC):** Firearms suicide rates can’t be attributed to poverty. Their correlation literally drops to zero when either GLS or HFR are taken into account. Nor, as our “controlling for” exercise demonstrates, are firearm suicides substantially driven by gun law strength (above right). Check out those red circles. Note how the r between GLS and FASUIC (-0.75) plunges to a measly -0.015 once HFR, with which GLS is closely linked (-0.84), comes into the picture. Reversing that, HFR retains a heady relationship with FASUIC ($r=0.59$) even after we remove GLS’s contribution. In the end, the real driver of firearms suicide seems to be gun availability. And that makes perfect sense.

We came to near-identical conclusions two-and-a half years ago when a string of massacres befell our tortured land (“[Four Weeks, Six Massacres](#)”). And despite [Giffords’](#) and OGVP’s bountiful praise of California’s supposedly stern approach to regulating firearms, nothing’s really changed. Its assault weapons “ban”, for example, continues to be mostly an effort in pretending to regulate. Here’s some self-plagiarism from “[An American Tragedy](#)”:

But don’t California’s “strong” gun laws prohibit “assault weapons”? Technically yes, but the devil is in the details. For example, if a gun has a removable magazine, it can’t sport features such as a protruding pistol grip. Wily manufacturers have adapted with a host of legal variants.



Our essay depicted the “California-legal” rifles used in the 2015 San Bernardino

massacre. So have things changed? Grab a look at the [AP photo](#) of a gun display in a Los Angeles-area gun store. According to the accompanying *L.A. Times* piece (it’s niftily entitled “A troubling California trend: More violent crimes with guns even as restrictions tighten”) *gun violence has* changed. It’s gotten *worse*.

Reacting to the crisis, [California Governor Kevin Newsom just signed](#) a cluster of bills, from [SB 2](#), which “strengthens California’s restrictions regarding public carry laws by enhancing the existing licensing system”, to [AB 732](#), which “strengthens the process for removing firearms from people who are prohibited from owning them due to a criminal conviction.” However well-intentioned, these laws fail to address the socioeconomic problems that, as our “[Neighborhoods](#)” posts regularly point out, underlie violent crime (see, for example, “[What’s Up. Violence. Where? Where Else?](#)”). As the below table demonstrates, this consequence is readily apparent at the level of police precincts.

Our recent essay about violence in Los Angeles, “[Good News/Bad News](#)” compared LAPD Divisions at each end of the homicide, aggravated assault and robbery spectrum during the first five months of 2021, 2022 and 2023. This time we used [LAPD data](#) to compare violent crime rates and shooting victim rates per/100,000 pop. during the January 1-September 30 periods in 2021 and 2023 for the five LAPD Divisions at each extreme of the violent crime spectrum:

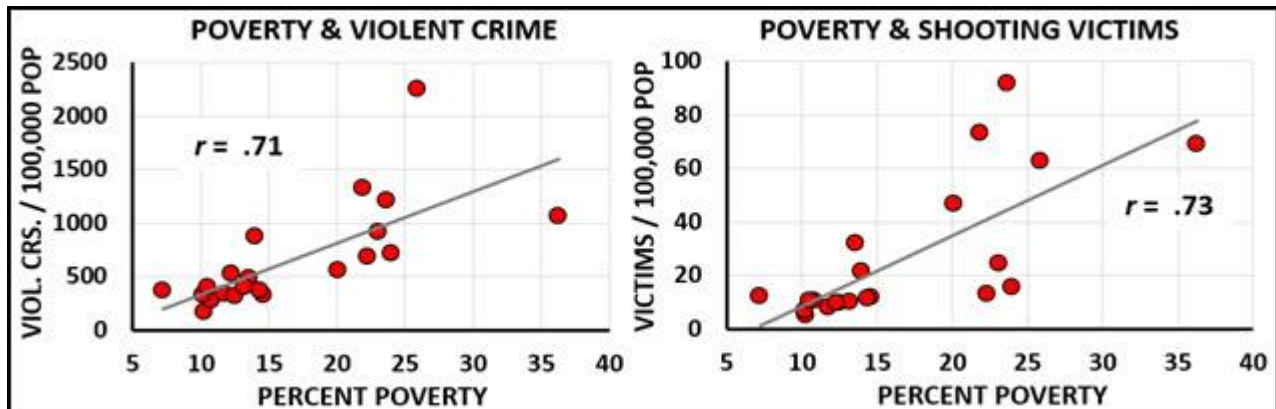
				1/1/2023 - 9/30/2023				1/1/2021 - 9/30/2021			
LEAST VIOL	DIVISION	POP	POV PCT	VIOL CRIMES	VIOL CR RT	SHTG VICTS	SHTG VICT RT	VIOL CRIMES	VIOL CR RT	SHTG VICTS	SHTG VICT RT
	West L.A	242928	10.3	402	165.5	12	4.9	397	163.4	8	3.3
	Devonshire	230518	10.8	635	275.5	24	10.4	570	247.3	16	6.9
	Foothill	196318	10.2	643	327.5	13	6.6	652	332.1	26	13.2
	Mission	249755	14.6	818	327.5	29	11.6	884	353.9	32	12.8
	West Valley	201893	10.5	798	395.3	21	10.4	684	338.8	18	8.9
	AVG.		11.3		298.3		8.8		287.1		9.0
	MOST VIOL	Hollywood	131236	14	1140	868.7	28	21.3	1344	1024.1	24
Southeast		150720	23.7	1820	1207.5	138	91.6	1812	1202.2	184	122.1
Newton		149495	36.3	1580	1056.9	103	68.9	1487	994.7	124	82.9
77th St.		187292	21.9	2476	1322.0	137	73.1	2597	1386.6	228	121.7
Central		81747	25.9	1838	2248.4	51	62.4	1709	2090.6	38	46.5
AVG.			24.4		1340.7		63.5		1339.6		78.3
CITYWIDE		3908705	16.6	22533	576.5	906	23.2	22823	583.9	1100	28.1

- Violent crime. Citywide, LAPD reported a January 1-September 30 drop from 22,823 in 2021 to 22,533 in 2023. That's only one-point-three percent. And as one would expect, the benefits weren't equally dispersed. Two Divisions in the "least violent" group (West Valley and Devonshire) experienced substantial upticks. As for the "most violent" group, ups and downs among its members produced virtually the same average rates for both periods.
- Shooting victims. Similar ups and downs led to virtually no change in the average number of shooting victims of the five "least violent" Divisions. However, the mean score of the "most violent" group materially improved. That was due to substantial drops in the number of victims in Southeast, Newton and, especially, 77th. St. Division. But rates in Hollywood and, particularly, Central Division worsened.

We don't discount that whatever improvements took place – again, note the substantial decline in shooting victims in 77th. St. Division – may have been produced by more attention to local needs. Or, say, more vigorous policing. But differences between Divisions remained pronounced. In 2023 LAPD's five most violent Divisions had a violent crime rate *four and one-half times* worse, and its citizens were being shot *more than seven times more frequently*, than residents of the five least violent Divisions.

What underlies these dramatic between-group differences? Grab a look at our introductory bar graph. Then glance at the above table's "POV PCT" column. High-violence divisions had *more than twice* the percentage of residents living in poverty (see

“[Good News/Bad News](#)” for how Division poverty rates were calculated.) And that unholy alliance between poverty and violence extends far beyond our ten-Division sample. These scattergrams, which represent all 21 LAPD Field Divisions (each is a “dot”) demonstrate the strong association between poverty and 2023 violent crime, and between poverty and 2023 shooting victims, throughout the “City of Angels”:



That’s why “feel good” pieces such as a recent [L.A. Times article](#) that boasts of a substantial drop in “overall” violence leave us a bit cold. What to do? Vigorously address the underlying issue. As our [Neighborhoods](#) posts frequently point out, crime, and particularly *violent* crime, reflects the consequences of living in deprivation. And that’s not something that even the best policing can hope to correct.

Posted 2/20/23

PUNISHMENT ISN'T A COPS JOB (II)

In Memphis, unrelenting violence helps sabotage the craft



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. During the evening hours of January 7, Memphis Police Department's "Scorpion" anti-crime unit set the stage for yet another memorial to police abuse. A few days later, after Tyre Nichols died from his injuries, residents adorned the spot of his final encounter, transforming a residential streetcorner into an ode for a twenty-nine year old California transplant whom few had really known.

That place, the intersection of Castlegate and Bear Creek lanes, was where officers intercepted Mr. Nichols after he fled from their colleagues. His first encounter, at Baines and Ross Roads, where authorities say they stopped him for reckless driving, was captured by a pole-mounted camera and the bodycam of a late-arriving cop. (Click [here](#) for our condensed version of the video.)

Unfortunately, that's the only video that's been released of that first stop. So we can't tell whether there really was a pressing, let alone legitimate reason to make the stop. Nor whether Mr. Nichols, who is depicted being dragged out of his car by an angry, cursing cop, had *really* refused to peacefully exit the vehicle.



All along, Mr. Nichols speaks calmly. But he evidently offered some physical resistance, and the officers used pepper-spray and a Taser (third image). Even so, Mr. Nichols quickly managed to break free and run off (fourth image).



As members of a special team, the officers who made the stop were in an unmarked car. That could have worried Mr. Nichols from the start. Their aggressiveness and crude language may have also come as a shock. We don't know whether Mr. Nichols was under the influence of drugs, leading him to be uncooperative and combative, such as what's been attributed to persons in the throes of "[excited delirium](#)." Police later [asked Mr. Nichols' mother](#) if her son was on drugs, as he had displayed "superhuman strength" when they tried to apply handcuffs. But she said that the tall, skinny man suffered from [Crohn's disease](#). That's a substantial disability. And during the struggle at the first stop location, one of the cops got accidentally hit with pepper-spray (click [here](#) for a brief clip that depicts the officer's partner rinsing out his eyes.) That dousing might have relaxed the cops' grip on Mr. Nichols.

Whatever enabled the man's escape, the initial encounter demonstrates a lack of tactical aptitude. Contrast that with what happened at the start of the disastrous incident after which this essay is entitled, [the murder of George Floyd](#), when a rookie cop got the drug-addled man out of his car, in handcuffs and on the sidewalk without causing him any harm. Floyd's supposedly drug-induced "superhuman strength" came later, when he violently resisted being seated in a police car. ([See the testimony](#) of MPD Lt. Johnny Mercil and MPD medical support coordinator Officer Nicole Mackenzie during Chauvin's trial.).

Once he broke free, Mr. Nichols hot-footed it to his mother's house. It's located in one of Memphis' nicer areas, about a half-mile away. Alas, another Scorpion crew caught up with him as he entered the neighborhood. That encounter, which involved twice as many cops as the first, was grotesquely violent



from the start, with officers mercilessly kicking and pummeling Mr. Nichols (left image) and repeatedly dousing him with pepper spray (right image). About six minutes later, once Mr. Nichols was virtually unresponsive, they dragged him away (left image) and



propped him against one of their cars (right image.) (Click [here](#) for our condensed version of the polecam video, and [here](#) and [here](#) for our condensed versions of officer bodycam videos.)

Most of our information came from the videos and the veritable flood of news coverage. (Click [here](#) for the *Associated Press* Nichols “hub”, with links to each of their stories.) Other than the videos, little has been officially released. On January 20, two weeks after the encounter, Memphis PD Chief Cerelyn “CJ” Davis posted [a brief notice](#) announcing the firing, earlier that day, of the five officers who encountered Mr. Nichols at the streetcorner. One week later she delivered [a video address](#). Her remarks (click [here](#) for a transcript) implicitly attributed their “egregious” behavior for his death. Calling her cops’ conduct “heinous, reckless and inhumane”, a violation of “basic human rights” and “the opposite” of what they were sworn to do, she promised “a complete and independent review...on all of the Memphis Police Department's specialized units.” ([According to the AP](#), as of February 7 six Memphis officers have been fired over the incident and a seventh was removed from duty.)



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Still, the Chief didn't say that police were *solely* to blame for the horrific outcome:

I promise full and complete cooperation from the Memphis Police Department with the Department of Justice, the FBI, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, and the Shelby County District Attorney's office to determine the entire scope of facts that contributed to Tyree Nichols death.

So far, none of these agencies have released their reports. Shelby County's Coroner is also yet to publicly weigh in. However, [according to a lawyer retained by the Nichols family](#), "preliminary findings" issued by "a highly regarded, nationally renowned forensic pathologist" revealed that Mr. Nichols "suffered extensive bleeding caused by a severe beating." Whether drugs or a prior medical condition might played a role in his death is yet to be announced.

Medical issues aside, did Mr. Nichols' behavior during the initial stop make things worse? [A police report](#) filed by the "Scorpions" supposedly stated that Nichols was a suspect in an aggravated assault, that he was "sweating profusely and irate" when he got out of the car, that he grabbed for an officer's gun, and that he pulled on the cops' belts (ostensibly, to get a gun). But nothing was said about the officers' use of force. Really, given the horrific police conduct captured on the videos, Mr. Nichols' physical condition and behavior now seem beside the point. Fundamentally, we have a replay of another shameful saga. Had Derek Chauvin not forcibly held him down for those infamous six minutes, a man who *had* committed a (minor) crime, who *did* have drugs in his system, and who *did* exhibit seemingly "superhuman strength" would have come out alive.

Had the Memphis cops not savagely beat Mr. Nichols, he, too would have unquestionably survived. But they did. So were they rogues from the start? Demetrius Haley, the officer who pulled Mr. Nichols from his car, was a former prison guard. Three years before becoming a cop [he reportedly participated in a "savage beating"](#) that led to a Federal lawsuit. Yet Memphis hired him anyway.

["Three \(In?\)explicable Shootings"](#) and ["Black on Black"](#) discuss other encounters between Black cops and Black citizens that ended poorly. But our essays are cluttered with examples of "easily rattled, risk-intolerant, impulsive or aggressive" White cops as well. And their deficiencies were often no secret. Consider the Minneapolis cop who [shot and killed a 9-1-1 caller](#) for the "crime" of walking up to his car. Not only did he stack up serious complaints during his first two years on the job, but his fitness to be a cop was questioned by psychiatrists when he was hired. And there's the tragic November 2014 [shooting of Tamir Rice](#), a 12-year old Cleveland boy. He was gunned down by a rookie who had been pressed to resign by his former agency. Here's what that department's deputy chief said:

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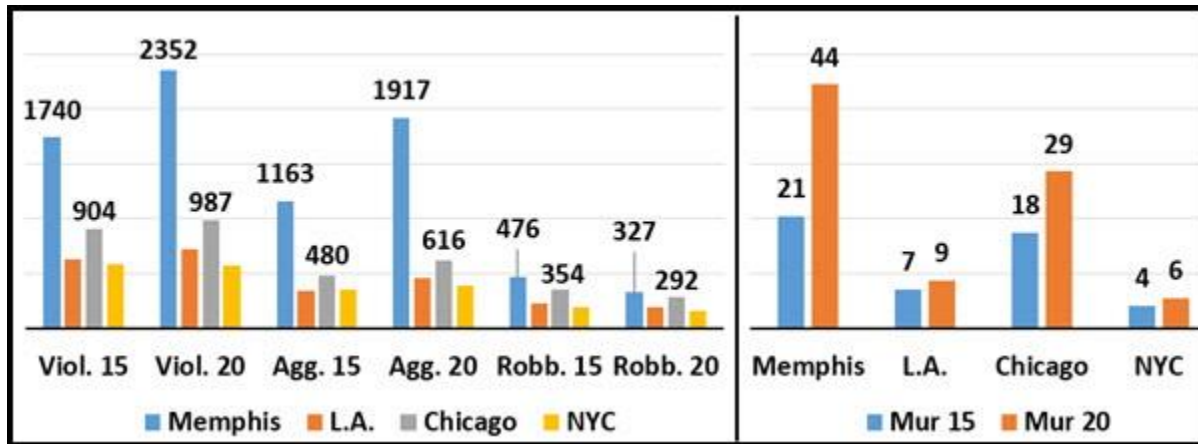
He could not follow simple directions, could not communicate clear thoughts nor recollections, and his handgun performance was dismal...I do not believe time, nor training, will be able to change or correct the deficiencies...

How did “the craft of policing” sink to the level displayed by the “Scorpions”? Let’s start by assessing a central feature of the police workplace: crime. According to [a recent survey](#) by the Major Cities Chiefs Association, here’s where Memphis sat, violent crime-wise, during the first six months of last year:



(MCCA reported data for seventy agencies, but we only calculated crime rates per 100,000 pop. for the sixty metropolitan police departments whose [population base](#) could be readily determined. Also remember that these are *six-month* rates).

Memphis’ violent crime problem is nothing new. Turning to the [UCR](#), here’s how its 2015 and 2020 *full-year* crime rates compared with our “usual suspects” (L.A., Chicago and New York City):

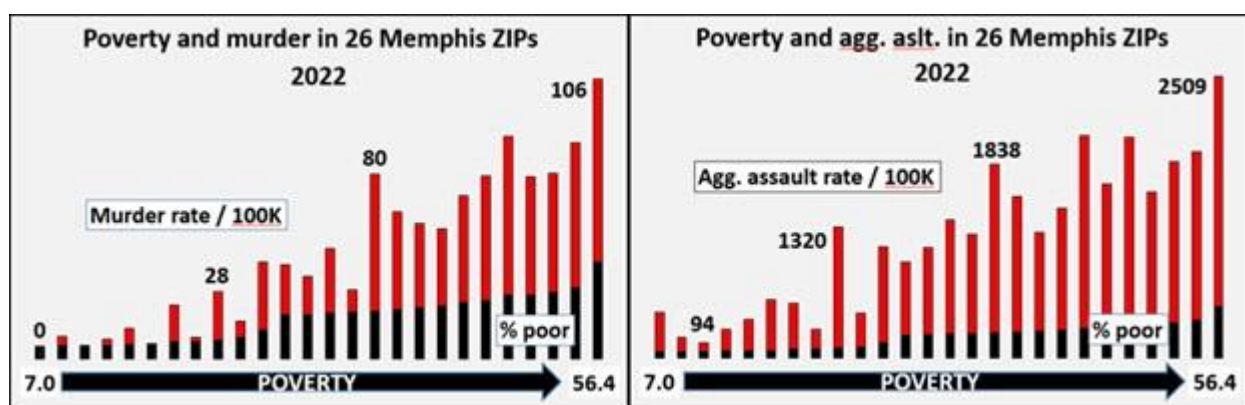


Again, these are rates per 100,000 population. Their underlying frequencies are also very revealing. For example, Memphis (pop. 657,936) reported 135 murders and 11,449 violent crimes in 2015. Los Angeles (pop. 3,962,726), a city six times in population, suffered *twice* as many murders (282) and *a bit more than twice* as many violent crimes (25,156).

And it gets worse *within*. Drawing violent crime data from the [Memphis hub](#), and poverty data from the [Census](#), we calculated full-year, per/100,000 rates for murder, aggravated assault and robbery for each of the city's twenty-six unique ZIP codes. We used correlation (the "r" statistic) to assess the relationships between poverty and crime ("r" ranges from zero to one: zero means no relationship, one denotes a lock-step association):

<i>r</i>	Murder	Agg aslt	Robb
Poverty	0.91	0.9	0.59

These *r*'s suggest that poverty, murder and aggravated assault are essentially two sides of the same coin. And robbery isn't far behind. These sobering messages are also conveyed by the graphs and the table (both list Zip's by poverty, from low to high):



Prior essays, most recently “[What’s Up? Violence](#)” and “[Woke Up, America!](#)”, emphasized the criminogenic effects of poverty. “[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)” pointed out that cities need lots of “prosperous neighborhoods” to keep their overall violence stat’s down. With nearly one in four residents in poverty, that’s where Memphis falls decidedly short. Its 2022 citywide murder rate, a nasty 33, is higher than the rates of LAPD’s notoriously violent [77th. Street Division](#) (pop. 175,000), which came in at 30, and NYPD’s chronically beset [73rd. precinct](#) (pop. 86,000), which scored an extreme (by Big Apple standards) 26. Indeed, the 37 per 100,000 rate where Mr. Nichols’ first encounter with police took place – Raines & Ross roads, Zip 38115 – is one of eleven that exceed the city’s overall 33; and most, by comfortable margins (38126, where more than half live in poverty, scored a soul-churning 106.)

So what’s our point? Prosperity can give cops a relatively peaceful environment in which to ply their craft. But there’s precious little prosperity *or* peace in Memphis, a city literally awash in violence. It’s that carnage that in November 2021 led the police chief [to deploy teams](#) – they were impolitically named “Scorpion” – to conduct what are essentially stop-and-frisk campaigns. As one might have expected, their aggressive posture quickly generated blowback. That’s not unlike what similar projects encountered elsewhere. “[A Recipe for Disaster](#)” and

“[Turning Cops Into Liars](#)” described the travails of LAPD’s Metro teams, which focused on violence-ridden “hot spots”. Its members were repeatedly accused of making needless stops, using excessive force, and justifying their unseemly behavior by lying on reports. Like issues long plagued the L.A. County Sheriff’s Dept., which continues struggling with “[deputy gangs](#).” Similar problems have beset anti-crime campaigns in Chicago, New York City and elsewhere. Some of these programs were disbanded, but surges in violence that accompanied the pandemic brought many back.

What happened in Memphis may not be unique. Its exhaustive visual documentation, though, is one for the record books. What’s more, it wasn’t just one or two cops, who could be blamed as outliers. So far, *more than a dozen officers* (including two Shelby

Memphis 2022 rates				
Zip	Pov	Murd	Ag Aslt	Robb
38120	7	0	428	48
38018	8	5	152	44
38125	8	0	94	19
38117	8	4	237	135
38133	8	9	346	46
38119	9	0	554	117
38141	10	21	506	69
38016	10	2	217	60
38103	11	28	1320	513
38134	13	9	366	93
38104	17	39	1048	450
38111	25	29	794	408
38128	26	22	947	177
38115	27	37	1241	372
38122	27	13	1084	414
38107	28	80	1838	458
38116	29	56	1474	272
38112	30	49	1077	189
38109	31	45	1330	200
38114	33	62	2099	399
38118	34	72	1559	809
38105	37	92	2042	717
38127	37	69	1448	206
38108	38	69	1763	318
38106	41	84	1840	337
38126	56	106	2509	406
City	23	33	954	249

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County deputies) have been implicated in the brutal episode. Their “job done” nonchalance after pummeling Mr. Nichols – they mill about exchanging casual talk – fits that “[culture of violence and bravado](#)” which the head of Memphis’ NAACP chapter, Van Turner, believes has infected policing throughout the U.S. As we watched the videos, the thrashing conveyed an angry fusion reminiscent of how George Floyd was treated after he fought the cops. Punishing someone with a merciless beating, as in Memphis, or by relentlessly pinning them to the ground and ignoring their pleas, as in Minneapolis, really *is* “two sides of the same coin.”

What’s to be done? As usual, police executives have taken to rulemaking. [A recently enacted LAPD regulation](#) prohibits pretextual stops unless officers have “articulable information” that a citizen’s behavior could lead to serious injury or death. And there’s Chicago PD’s [5,777 word foot-chase policy](#), whose complexities led the police union to (justifiably, we think) characterize it as a “no-foot-chase” policy.

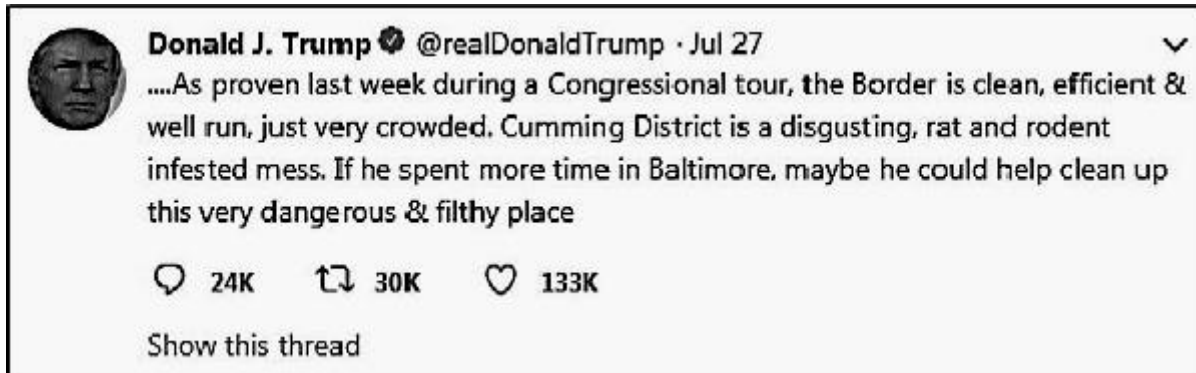
Of course, limiting stops and chases *will* keep some terrible things from happening. Perhaps a balance can be struck so that imposing limits won’t encourage evildoers and compromise public safety. Still, having worked in policing, we’re skeptical that rules alone will keep cops from responding emotionally, and particularly in highly charged, violence-laden environments such as Memphis. What’s needed? We could start by frankly discussing such things in the academy and at all levels of police organizations. How can the craft of policing – it *is* an art form, by the way – be practiced so that it resists the unholy influences of the workplace? And we mean the *whole* environment: both citizens *and* cops.

Give it a whirl. And if you do, let us know how it pans out!

Posted 8/2/19

REPEAT AFTER US: “CITY” IS MEANINGLESS

When it comes to crime, it's neighborhoods that count



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. There we were, wondering what to spout off about when our sleep-deprived Prez came to the rescue with yet another [tweetstorm](#).

What set him on the warpath? Ten days earlier, [Rep. Elijah Cummings \(D – Md.\)](#), chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, had [berated DHS Acting Chief Kevin McAleenan](#) about the unconscionable treatment of illegal immigrants. After repeatedly interrupting McAleenan, the good Rep. blasted him with this:

I'm talking about human beings. I'm not talking about people that come from, as the president said, shitholes. These are human beings. Human beings. Just trying to live a better life.

Natch, the President noticed. Displayed above is his second rapid-fire tweet. Here's the first:

Rep. Elijah Cummings has been a brutal bully, shouting and screaming at the great men & women of Border Patrol about conditions at the Southern Border, when actually his Baltimore district is FAR WORSE and more dangerous. His district is considered the Worst in the USA.

Here's the third, (temporarily) ending the salvo:

Why is so much money sent to the Elijah Cummings district when it is considered the worst run and most dangerous anywhere in the United States. No human

being would want to live there. Where is all this money going? How much is stolen? Investigate this corrupt mess immediately!

Rep. Cummings, who's based in Baltimore, promptly swiped back. And as one might expect, the "fake media" took his side. [In a news piece](#) defiantly entitled "Baltimore to Trump: Knocking Our City Is Our Job, Not Yours" the liberally-inclined *New York Times* proclaimed that despite the city's reputation for violence, "it so happens that many human beings do want to live in Baltimore." That lukewarm endorsement was the story's exact title in the paper's July 29th. National edition, which lands somewhere on our driveway each morning.

We'll let the antagonists fight it out. Their squabble proved useful, though, as it illustrates one of our pet peeves: mindlessly comparing crime rates. "[Location, Location, Location](#)" tracked murders for thirteen major cities during 2002-2015. St. Louis, the indisputable champ, closed things out with a mind-boggling 59.6 killings per 100,000 pop. Nipping on its heels, Baltimore posted a deplorable 55.2. At the other, far safer end, our burg. of Los Angeles (7.2) and the Trumpster's New York City (4.2) returned the lowest scores.

We've since used the [latest full UCR release](#) to assess murder rates in 2017. St. Louis (66.1) and Baltimore (55.8) managed to get worse. Los Angeles (7.0) held steady, while New York City (3.4) improved. Baltimore's homicide rate turned out *sixteen times worse* than the Big Apple's. The raw numbers are stunning. New York City had 292 murders; Baltimore, whose population is *one fourteenth* the size, suffered 342. Even the *Times* had to concede that Rep. Cummings' constituents aren't in a happy place, crime-wise:

Few denied that Baltimore is struggling, especially with violent crime — the city has recorded 32 more murders this year than New York, despite being about one-fourteenth the size.

[Mayor Bill de Blasio's boast](#) that New York City is "the safest big city in America" seems right on the money. Meanwhile, Baltimore is still in the doghouse. Trump's no paragon of accuracy, but this time he nailed it.

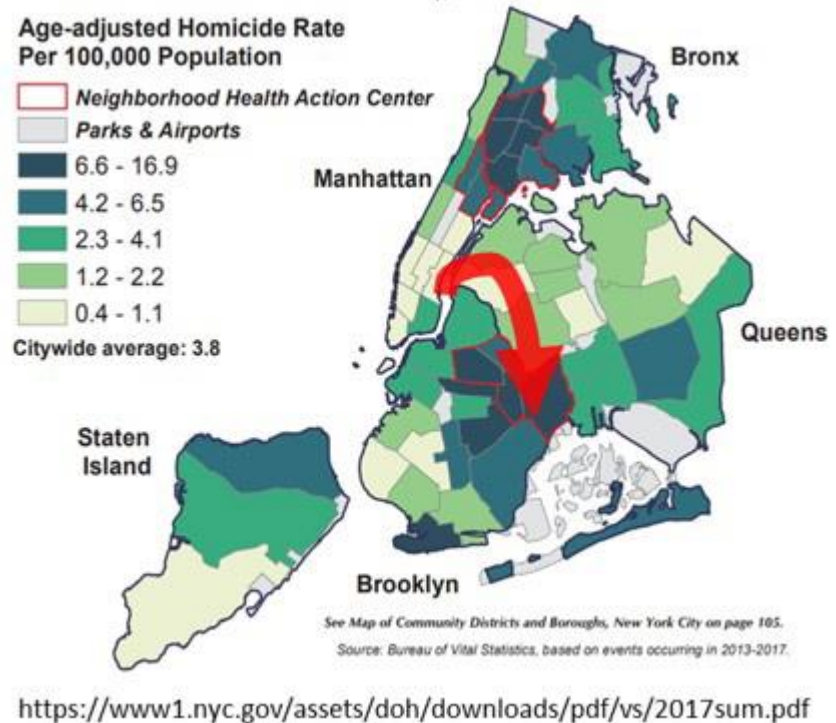
Right?

Well, not exactly. Our President's most recent domicile in the Big Apple was an ultra-lux apartment in Manhattan's fashionable [Upper East Side](#) (pop. 226,000, poverty ratio 7%, lowest in the city.) But there's a lot more to New York than Fifth Avenue. It's a really, *really* big place, with [more than one-hundred distinct communities](#). Mayor de

Blasio aside, the city's own data reveals that these neighborhoods are by no means uniformly prosperous.

Some are phenomenally (absurdly?) wealthy' others are [chronically poor](#).

Just follow the arrow. Jump across the East river. Venture deep into Brooklyn and you'll find the [Brownsville](#) area (pop. 86,000, poverty ratio 28%, one of the worst in the city.) That's where a few days ago, on July 27th, [a gang member opened fire](#) as folks gathered for an annual celebration. Twelve were shot, one fatally.



While such extreme events are rare, Brownsville is indeed a very tough place:

- Its police precinct, the 73rd., [recorded thirteen murders](#) during 2018. (Far larger [Manhattan](#) had but one.)
- Brownsville's [2013-2017 homicide rate](#), 16.9, was worst in the city. To compare, the Upper East Side was tied for best at 0.4. Yes, that's *zero point four*. (For a detailed view of major crimes by precinct, click [here](#).)

What's our point? Neighborhoods in [Los Angeles](#) and New York (above and in "[Be Careful What You Brag About](#)") vary considerably as to violence. Where economic indicators are favorable, violent crime is low. Where they're not: fasten seat belts! Both cities, though, are blessed with a lot of affluence, keeping their overall homicide numbers at bay. If we wish to *meaningfully* compare murder across geographic space, we must go beyond abstract political boundaries. To that end, there really is no "Los Angeles" or "New York." What there is, is *neighborhoods*. Crime is about the conditions



<https://homicides.news.baltimoresun.com/>

under which people live. Control for factors such as poverty, unemployment rates and educational attainment and you're all set!

In our measly opinion, that caveat applies everywhere. Still, as [data compiled by the Baltimore Sun](#) demonstrates (see table), nearly every area in the struggling city is bedeviled by violence, some more than others. Rep. Cummings clearly has his work cut out.

But if our Prez wants to rattle cages, we suggest he pick on New

York City's de Blasio. Here's a recommended broadside: "How does it make you feel, your honor, that your city's Brownsville neighborhood is saddled with a murder rate more than *forty times* worse than the Upper East Side? And how do you intend to improve things?"

Um, we're waiting!

Posted 4/24/16

ROLE REVERSAL

Chicago's falling apart. Who can make the violence stop?

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Tyshawn Lee was only nine years old when he was viciously gunned down. It wasn't a stray round. Several weeks ago police arrested Dwight Boone-Doty, a member of the Black P-Stones. He was identified as the triggerman for a three-hoodlum team that lured the child into a South Side alley and executed him last November. One of the killer's alleged helpmates, Corey Morgan, was previously arrested, and the other is being sought. Boone-Doty was also charged in the unrelated October killing of a woman and the wounding of her companion.

In the mean streets of Chicago, arrests often mark the beginning of another cycle of violence. Soon after learning of Boone-Doty's arrest, the dead boy's father, Pierre Stokes, reportedly tracked down Corey Morgan's girlfriend and her two nephews. He unleashed a barrage of gunfire; fortunately his aim was poor and no one was struck. Stokes, a member of the rival Gangster Disciples gang and a convicted robber, is now also in jail.

Why was the child murdered? That, too was reportedly in retaliation, for the gunning down of Corey Morgan's brother and the wounding of his grandmother a month earlier. In our brave new world of smartphones, robots and space exploration, Chicago seems determined to hang on to the code of the homies. This year, the Windy City recorded 161 murders by April 17, a 64% increase over the comparable period in 2015 and 115% more than in 2014. Shootings have also soared, from 482 to 803, an increase of sixty-seven percent. Days with multiple victims are common, and three or four slain is unexceptional. So far the record was on February 4, when a staggering ten persons were killed, four by bullets and six with knives.

It's not a new problem. Last year Chicago topped the thirty largest cities in violent crime. Its rate, 2,377.3 violent crimes per 100,000 population, is more than 50% higher than its closest competitors, Baltimore (1550.6) and Detroit (1508.8). Chicago seems well on track to shatter more records this year.

Chicago PD has long struggled to earn the confidence of the minority community. Things sank to a new low last November when police were ordered to release a video depicting, in graphic detail, the apparently needless gunning down of Laquan McDonald, a black youth, by officer Jason Van Dyke more than a year earlier. That was the "tipping point" that led to the firing of chief Garry McCarthy and the appointment,

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by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, of a citizen commission, the “Police Accountability Task Force,” that was charged with studying the troubled agency in depth.

Its report was just released. In a scathing, no-holds-barred account, it offers four reasons to explain why trust was lost:

We arrived at this point in part because of racism.

We arrived at this point because of a mentality in CPD that the ends justify the means.

We arrived at this point because of a failure to make accountability a core value and imperative within CPD.

We arrived at this point because of a significant underinvestment in human capital.

According to the task force, the department’s own data “gives validity” to “the widely held belief the police have no regard for the sanctity of life when it comes to people of color.” What are the numbers? In a city with approximately equal proportions of whites, blacks and Hispanics, 74% of the 404 persons shot by police between 2008-2015 were black, 14% were Hispanic and 8% were white. “Significant racial disparities” were also found for lesser uses of force, car stops and field interviews. (Nothing was said about the distribution of violent crime, but it is known to be far higher in minority areas.)

There was other bad news. Reviewers discovered that complaints against officers are perfunctorily investigated by employees who are “under-resourced, lack true independence and are not held accountable for their work.” Even when they recommend discipline, in nearly three out of every four cases arbitrators reverse the decision or mitigate its severity. That’s no surprise. Years ago, in a review of Chicago PD’s disciplinary practices, we reported that the Chicago Police Board – nine citizens who to this day hold the final say on who gets punished – upheld the termination of only twenty-one out of eighty cops recommended for firing by the Superintendent between 2003-2007. Then-chief Jody Weis, a retired FBI executive who had been brought in to clean up the department, lamented that his cops were in effect answerable to no one.

Apparently the struggle over accountability has continued. A database of complaints against Chicago’s finest paints a distressing picture. Investigators seldom recommend discipline, while officers are rarely punished despite amassing dozens of citizen complaints. One cop accumulated sixty-eight in eighteen years; none were sustained. Scrolling through the entries reveals that this was the norm.

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What can be done? As one might expect, the task force recommended that supervision be greatly enhanced. Reviewers called for the early identification of problem officers, prompt intervention and effective discipline, meaning a process with real teeth. There were suggestions for improvements in community relations and officer training in de-escalation, and a recommendation that external oversight be provided by independent panels that are not dominated, as has been the practice, by former cops. Naturally, taking such steps will require the cooperation of the police union, whose contractual demands have supposedly “turned the code of silence into official policy.”

[Click here for the complete collection of conduct and ethics essays](#)

Even if labor climbs on board, there’s a huge fly in the ointment. Revamping the social compact between cops and citizens doesn’t address flaws in the compact among the citizens, who are gunning each other down with abandon. As we’ve repeatedly pointed out, police behavior is inextricably linked to the environment. Violence, and the threat of violence, inevitably beget the police use of force, justifiable and otherwise. Improvements in hiring, training and supervision are great, but when communities are as violent and socially disorganized as Chicago’s South Side, or Los Angeles’ Rampart Division, simply “fixing the cops” is no solution:

So-called “aggressive” policing could not have taken place in New York City in the absence of a demand to stem street crime. Abuses at Rampart did not start with a conspiracy between rogue officers. They began with a problem of crime and violence that beset Pico-Union. Into this web of fear and disorder we dispatched officers – members of the ineptly named CRASH – whose mission it was to reclaim the streets for the good folks.

Did we supply officers with special tools to help them accomplish their task? Of course not, since none exist. Yet our expectations remained high. Police officers gain satisfaction from success. Their work is also judged by superiors, who are more interested in numbers of arrests than in narrative expositions, the latter being difficult to pass up the chain of command and virtually impossible to use in budget fights at City Hall.

Officers aren’t interested in being occupiers. Most enjoy exercising discretion and making distinctions between the naughty and the nice. But when gangsters rule the streets, restraint – that valuable commodity that cops in more favorable climes exercise every day – goes out patrol car windows. We can threaten, train and reorganize until the cows come home, but reform can’t take hold in an atmosphere of unrequited violence. When officers are enveloped by disorder, the craft of policing is a lost cause.

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Ironically, Chicago's long-standing crime problems have made the city a laboratory for innovation. Over the years its police have experimented with various of initiatives, from predictive policing to the well-known Project Ceasefire. Four years ago the city announced an extensive set of violence-reduction strategies. Some were cops-only, others involved partnerships with citizens (for the most recent incarnation [click here](#).) Naturally, not everything has worked out. One promising approach, which used former gang members to "interrupt" violence, was reportedly dropped because a few "interrupters" apparently returned to their bad old ways.

Despite its many efforts, Chicago faces levels of violence not seen since the crack epidemic of the eighties and early nineties. It's obvious that police are an imperfect solution. Perhaps they shouldn't try to do it all. What the South Side (and reportedly, the West Side) need is a homegrown remedy, organized and run by residents, that could tamp down the violence wrecking their communities. Something peaceful yet emphatic, perhaps along the lines of Black Lives Matter but aimed within. Recommending what amounts to a role reversal might seem odd, but until Chicago's embattled residents help secure their own streets, they'll be safe for no one, including the police.

Posted 11/14/23

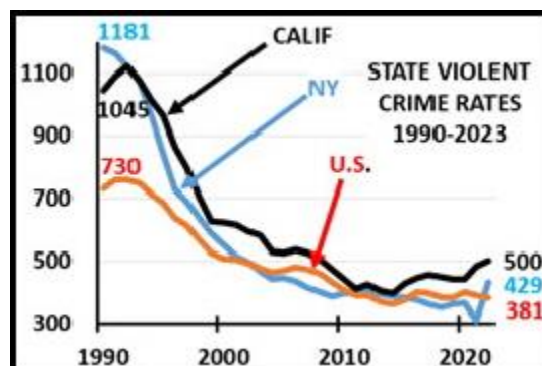
SEE NO EVIL – HEAR NO EVIL – SPEAK NO EVIL

Is the violent crime “problem” really all in our heads?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Cheekily entitled “This is Your Brain on Crime,” [a recent op-ed essay](#) by Nobel-prize winning economist and famous *New York Times* opinionizer Paul Krugman blasts self-serving politicians of the Red persuasion for promoting the fear that criminal violence is going up. Packed with charts and numbers, Dr. Krugman’s piece, which elaborates on his 2016 “[Inequality and the City](#)” essay, argues that except for a temporary, pandemic-related uptick, criminal violence has receded to historically low levels. Even better, his place of abode, New York City, “happens to have remarkably low crime, with a murder rate around half that of Republican-run cities like Miami and Fort Worth.”

On its face, Dr. Krugman’s contention that the trend in violent crime (homicide, rape, aggravated assault and robbery) is highly favorable seems well supported by data. This graph, and its accompanying table, are based on the latest numbers from the FBI’s [Crime Data Explorer](#).



	VIOLENT CRIME RATES								
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022
CALIF	1045.2	966	621.6	526	439.6	428	442	481.2	499.5
N.Y.	1180.9	841.9	553.9	444.4	394.4	380.4	363.8	308.3	429.3
U.S.	729.6	684.5	506.5	469	404.5	373.7	398.5	387	380.7

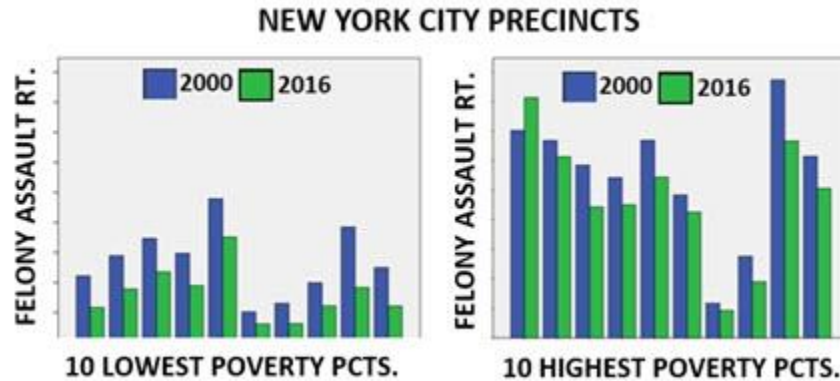
On the opposite coast, veteran *L.A. Times* staff writer Libor Jany, who covers the police beat, mostly agrees. His [recent article](#), “Crime is down, but fear is up: Why is L.A. still perceived as dangerous?” grouses that T.V. news remains fixated on “grisly murders and wild police chases” even though violent crime has substantially declined. But unlike his east-coast counterpart, Mr. Jany points out that the benefits haven’t been equally dispersed:

Places that have historically had the highest rates of violent crime, including South L.A., Watts and the northeast San Fernando Valley, remain hot spots. Black residents in the city’s poorest neighborhoods suffer the majority of the bloodshed, with Black children and adolescents in Los Angeles County killed by firearms at triple the rate of their proportion of the population, according to data from the Department of Public Health’s Office of Violence Prevention.

1/1/2023 – 9/30/2023		
	POV	VIOL
DIVISION	PCT	CR RT
West L.A.	10.3	165.5
Devonshire	10.8	275.5
Foothill	10.2	327.5
Mission	14.6	327.5
West Valley	10.5	395.3
AVG.	11.3	298.3
Hollywood	14	868.7
Southeast	23.7	1207.5
Newton	36.3	1056.9
77th St.	21.9	1322.0
Central	25.9	2248.4
AVG.	24.4	1340.7
CITYWIDE	16.6	576.5

“[Good News/Bad News](#)” and “[Policing Can’t Fix What Really Ails](#)” recently addressed the burdens of economic deprivation in great detail. Check out the table on the left. According to present-year data (1/1 thru 9/30/23) LAPD’s five most violent divisions have violent crime rates nearly *four and one-half times* greater than their counterparts on the least violent end of the spectrum. What’s more, the violent divisions’ poverty rates are also more than twice as large. Compare their numbers to the preceding table. During the first nine months of 2023, four of the five high-violence divisions had violent crime rates that exceeded, several by substantial margins, the *full-year rates* that California, New York and the U.S. endured during the crack wars of the nineties.

So what *about* New York City? Our past analyses – “[Woke Up, America!](#)”, “[Place Matters](#)”, and “[Be Careful What You Brag About \(II\)](#)” – reported that poverty and violence had a powerful connection in Gotham as well. Compare these graphs from “[Be Careful](#)”:



Their “Y” (vertical) axes range from zero to 900 felony assaults per 100,000 pop. Clearly, the burden of poverty seems indisputable.

Now comes Dr. Krugman. His essay inspired us to update New York City’s crime numbers, and in a way that leaves (we hope) no doubt as to whether his “one-city” vision really holds up. Using data from [NYPD](#), the [UCR](#), the [FBI](#), the [Census](#), and [the City of New York](#), we collected violent crime numbers for 74 of New York City’s [77 police precincts](#) for the years 2000, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2021 and 2022. We skipped over the 14th. precinct (now “Midtown South”) because of its unique demographics (it’s home to office buildings, Times Square, Grand Central Terminal, Penn Station, Madison Square Garden and the Manhattan Mall). We also left out the “DOC” (Dept. of Corrections) precinct and the 121st. precinct, for which data was incomplete.

After calculating seventy-four precincts’ yearly violent crime rate (murders, felony assaults, rapes and robberies per 100,000 pop.), we identified the five precincts with the highest rates and the five precincts with the lowest rates each year. As it turns out, our “low” and “high” tables each wound up with eight precincts, but only the five “low” and five “high” yearly scores are displayed:

PRECINCTS WITH FIVE LOWEST VIOLENCE RATES														
VIOLENT CRIMES			2000		2010		2015		2020		2021		2022	
PCT	POP	POV	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT
123	100738	6.4	107	106.2	74	73.5	85	84.4	77	76.4	45	44.7	80	79.4
111	122211	9.0	246	201.3	139	113.7	119	97.4	106	86.7	115	94.1	189	154.7
122	144552	7.3	305	211.0					167	115.5	177	122.4	200	138.4
20	114575	8.4	310	270.6	158	137.9	132	115.2	148	129.2				
19	220261	7.1	607	275.6	257	116.7	241	109.4						
17	89367	7.7			118	132.0								
112	119739	10.6					109	91.0	114	95.2	136	113.6	190	158.7
68	136071	15.7									153	112.4	171	125.7
AVERAGE			9.0	212.9		114.8		99.5		100.6		97.4		131.4

PRECINCTS WITH FIVE HIGHEST VIOLENCE RATES

VIOLENT CRIMES			2000		2010		2015		2020		2021		2022	
PCT	POP	POV	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT	#	RT
28	49200	28.4	658	1337.4	460	935.0								
25	50996	32.8	696	1364.8	492	964.8	606	1188.3	557	1092.2	652	1278.5	697	1366.8
73	98506	31.4	1480	1502.4	1134	1151.2	1015	1030.4						
41	54454	38.5	1042	1913.5	707	1298.3	598	1098.2	500	918.2	558	1024.7	765	1404.9
81	68921	30	913	1324.7	721	1046.1								
48	89216	28.4					965	1081.6	805	902.3	880	986.4	1133	1270.0
40	100929	37.1					1139	1128.5	1205	1193.9	1185	1174.1	1455	1441.6
42	93755	38.5							923	984.5	1028	1096.5	1160	1237.3
AVERAGE	33.1			1488.6		1079.1		1105.4		1018.2		1112.0		1344.1

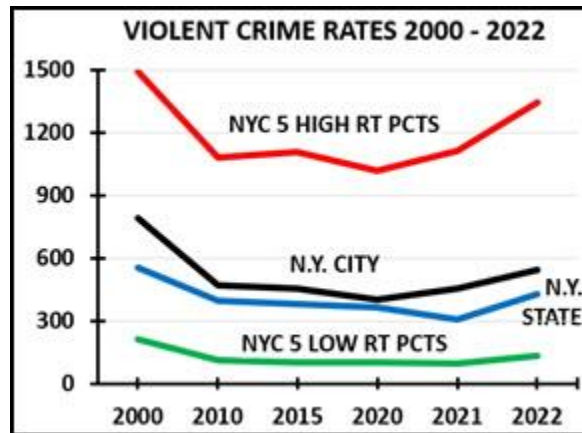
To clarify, # represents the actual number of violent crimes, and RT is the corresponding rate per 100,000 population. Mean rates (“AVERAGE”) were computed for two measures:

- Percent of residents in poverty across the eight districts in each table (2009-2013 est., with precinct boundaries based on comparisons between precinct and [council district maps](#))
- Mean of the five lowest and five highest precinct violence rates each year

More than six-hundred thousand persons (605,977) reside in the eight precincts that made it into our high-violence table. Their mean yearly violent crime rates were *seven to more than eleven times* worse than the corresponding yearly means of their low-violence counterparts. And the overall percentage of residents living in poverty was *3.7 times greater* in the high-violence precincts . Once again, the poverty/violent crime connection seems indisputable.

How does that fit historical trends? Here are New York City and New York state rates since 1990:

	VIOLENT CRIME RATES								
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022
NY City	2045.6	1573.2	790.4	673.1	469.1	456.0	404.0	456.4	546.2
N.Y.	1180.9	841.9	553.9	444.4	394.4	380.4	363.8	308.3	429.3



We couldn't find reliable New York City precinct stat's that precede 2000. But since then, the yearly violent crime rates of high-violence precincts have consistently exceeded – usually, by a substantial margin – the corresponding rates of both New York City and New York state. In 2000, as the U.S. was recovering from the crack epidemic of the nineties, our high-rate precincts' mean violent crime rate (1488.6) was *nearly twice* the city's 790.4 and *2.7 times worse* than the state's 553.9. (In fact, the 41st. precinct's sky-high 2000 rate of 1913.5 was far worse than the state's 1990 rate and nearly equaled the city's). By 2022, our high-violence precincts' mean rates were *2.5 times worse* than the city's and *3.1 times worse* than the state's.

Bottom line: citywide rates seriously understate the impact of violent crime on less prosperous areas. Our [Neighborhood](#) posts consistently demonstrate a profound connection between local economic conditions and violent crime. That's not just in La-La land and the Big Apple. Check out New Orleans ("[Hard Times in the Big Easy](#)"). And San Antonio ("[San Antonio Blues](#)"). And South Bend, Indiana ("[Human Renewal](#)"). And Portland and Minneapolis ("[Don't Divest – Invest!](#)").

Most of our readers are well aware that poverty and violence are closely linked. So why would a top economist make sweeping conclusions about crime without addressing within-city differences? Perhaps he wished to avoid implying that poor people are evil. Yet poverty undoubtedly plays a major role in setting the stage for the violence that besets the good, law-abiding residents of lower-income areas. After recent shootings in South Los Angeles' violence-beset Watts neighborhood (it's in Southeast Division), [the leader of a local peace coalition observed](#) that citywide declines in shootings and murders "don't necessarily reflect our reality." According to an L.A.-area gang interventionist, this "reality" can make normal life in poor areas impossible. "It's time for our children to be able to play outside, be able to walk to and from school safely...Because we want to make sure that our kids grow up to be doctors and lawyers and police officers and firefighters...This isn't a color thing."

What to do? While cops *do* matter, the answer lies *way* beyond policing. Once again, 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.

Set aside all that ideological gibberish. For this Administration, and the one after that, fixing neighborhoods is Job #1. We're (still) waiting!

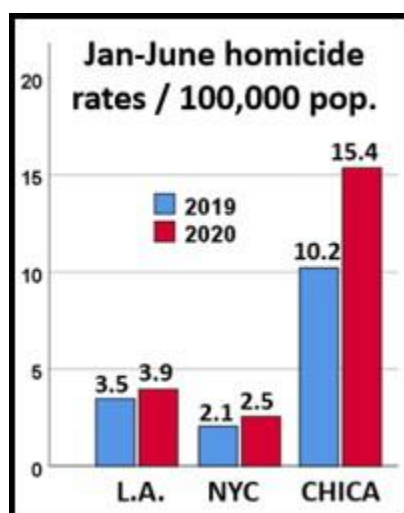
Posted 8/3/20

SHOULD POLICE TREAT THE *WHOLE* PATIENT?

*Officers deal with the symptoms of social decay.
Can they go further? Should they?*



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. “A boy walks to a corner store and is shot in the chest.” One can’t conceive of a more [devastating headline](#). Shot dead in an alley, Otis Williams was only fourteen. Many victims of America’s urban violence are kids. They’re also disproportionately Black and, just like Otis, reside in poor areas long beset by crime and violence.



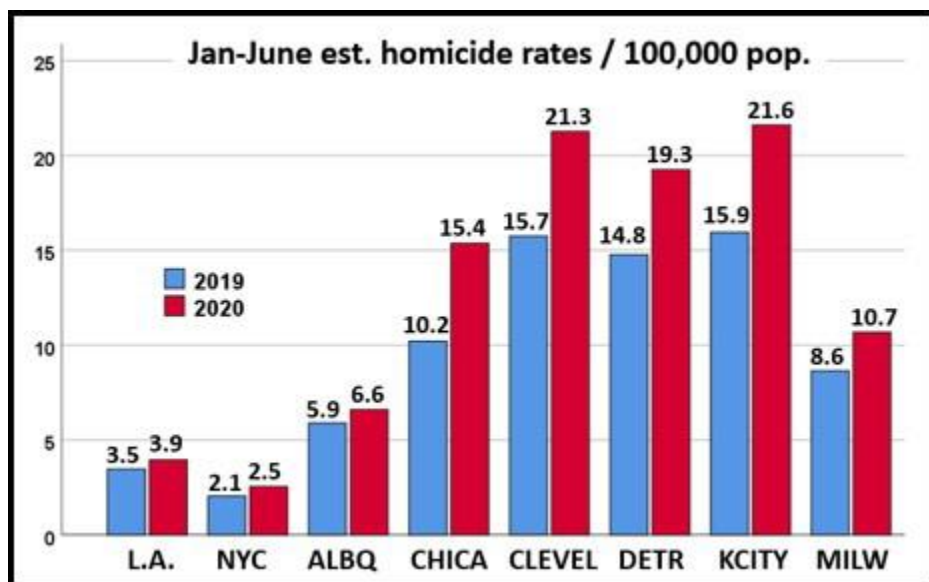
Otis lived with his mother in Florence, a South Los Angeles neighborhood [whose troubles we’ve repeatedly written about](#). When Los Angeles brags about its crime rate it doesn’t mention Florence. As we mentioned in “[Repeat After Us](#),” aggregate statistics obscure disparities in violence within cities, such as Los Angeles and New York City, that enjoy large pockets of wealth and seem prosperous and safe “overall.” But the recent upswing in violence has drawn notice to both. [Los Angeles’ 157 murders](#) through July 18 mark a 13.8 percent increase over the 138 homicides it recorded during the equivalent period last year. Ditto New York City, [whose count thru July 19](#), 212, reflects a 24 percent year-to-date jump. So there’s a lot less to brag about.

While regrettable, L.A.’s and New York City’s numbers hardly compare to what’s befallen chronically violent places such as Chicago. [As of July 19](#) the Windy City

recorded an appalling 414 homicides. That's *fifty percent* more than the relatively "measly" 275 murders it endured during the equivalent period last year. To compare, in 2019 New York City had about *twice* Chicago's population but suffered about *half* as many homicides. Chicago also had thirty percent more murders than L.A., a city nearly half again its size in population.

We've become so inured to the mayhem that it might be useful to look beyond the U.S. In 2019 (the full year) 650 persons were murdered in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.) Its combined population of about 66,650,000 produced a homicide rate of 0.97 per/100,000, less than half New York City's and a mere sliver of Chicago's (look at the below graph. The UK's bar would hardly show.) If that's not shocking enough, "[A Lost Cause](#)" compared U.S. and U.K. police officer deaths during 2000-2015. While the U.S. has about *five* times the U.K.'s population, *forty times* as many U.S. law enforcement officers were feloniously killed. (Not-so-incidentally, the disproportion may have something to do with the means. In the U.K., knives and such were used in fourteen of the 21 officer murders, while in the U.S., guns figured in all but seventy of the 831 killings.)

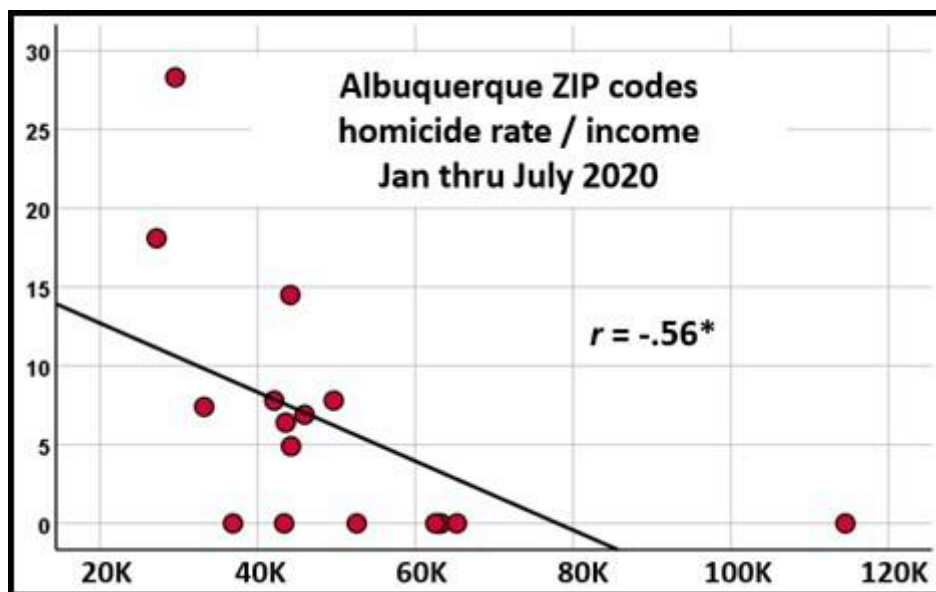
A new Federal initiative, "[Operation Legend](#)," intends to deal with the slaughter. Named after LeGend Taliferro, a four-year old Kansas City boy who was shot and killed several weeks ago, the program commits Federal funds and law enforcement



personnel from the FBI, Marshals Service, DEA and ATF to help Chicago Albuquerque, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City (Mo.) and Milwaukee battle gun and drug violence. This graph, which compares the homicide rates of "Operation Legend" cities during equivalent periods in 2019 and 2020, confirms that each could use some quality help. (L.A. and NYC are shown for comparison. Gathering the data was a bit tricky, but our numbers should be pretty accurate.)

Who outside Albuquerque would have thought that it had a *murder* problem? Its mayor, the Hon. Tim Keller, [bemoaned his city's descent](#) into crime and asked for State help last year. And with 37 homicides so far in 2020 (there were 33 during this period in 2019) the not-so-placid burg of 560,513 has been backsliding. Ditto Milwaukee, which suffered 63 murders through June compared with 51 in 2019. As for the others, their numbers are even more appalling. Cleveland had 60 killings thru July 7, 2019; this year the toll was 89. Detroit recorded 129 murders through June 18 compared with 99 last year. Kansas City went from 79 murders during the first half of 2019 to 107 so far this year.

We mentioned that aggregate statistics can conceal disparities within communities. That's why posts in our ["Neighborhoods"](#) special section often rely on *neighborhood*



crime rates. We recently placed that magnifying glass on [Portland and Minneapolis](#). As for Operation Legend cities, ["Mission: Impossible?"](#) looked within Chicago. So this time we picked on...Albuquerque! [KOB Channel 4's homicide map](#) showed 37 murders in 2020 thru July

30. They took place in nine of the city's seventeen regular Zip codes. Their population numbers and income figures were collected from [United States Zip Codes.org](#). As expected, the economics of the murder v. no-murder ZIP's proved starkly different. Mean MHI (median household income) for the nine ZIP's with at least one murder (actual range was two to seven) was \$39,969. Mean MHI for the eight murder-free ZIP's was \$62,668. Those means are clearly different and, statistically speaking, significantly so ($p=.015$). And check out that graph ("scattergram"). Note how the Zip codes (red dots) distribute along the income and murder rate/100,000 axes. Bottom line: more money: less murder! (That asterisk on the r correlation statistic - it maxes out at 1.0 - means that the association between income and homicide rate is statistically significant. It's also "negative," meaning that as one goes up the other goes down.)

OK, point made. We've confirmed what social scientists have known for decades: poverty and crime go together like...well, you know. So back to "Operation Legend." Feds have sponsored joint task forces for decades. [According to DOJ](#), agents will apply Federal laws and resources to help local police address "offenses involving firearms and violent drug trafficking organizations." It's intended to assure that serious criminals who might otherwise escape justice get their day in court. Your blogger participated in similar task forces during his Federal career and his presence generated no controversy. But in this hyper-partisan era, with the [brouhaha in Portland](#) framing the moment, it was perhaps inevitable that "Legend" would be disparaged [as yet another effort](#) to distract attention from the hardships that have long beset America's citizens of color. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who invited the Feds in, found it necessary to clarify that the outsiders wouldn't be wearing fatigues or chase after rock-throwers:

These are not troops. Troops are people who come from the military. That's not what's coming to Chicago. I've drawn a very firm line against that.

Mayor Lightfoot isn't simply waiting for "Legend." Chicago's explosive murder rate has led its new police chief, David Brown, to form "[Community Safety Teams](#)." Modeled on the well-known "[Hot Spots](#)" approach, their officers will focus on the neighborhoods beset by violence, mostly in the city's South and West. Agencies throughout the U.S. have used hot-spots, and [often with supposedly good results](#). A recent academic finding that hot spots "[is an effective crime prevention strategy](#)" has even led NIJ to bestow its [seal of approval](#). But sending in the cops can be tricky. "[A Recipe for Disaster](#)" and other posts in our "[Stop-and-frisk](#)" special section have cautioned that the bucketfuls of stops produced by get-tough campaigns inevitably generate "false positives," and as these accumulate they can severely irritate the inhabitants of neighborhoods police are ostensibly trying to serve. Carelessness, pressures to produce "numbers" and out-and-out lying by cops striving to look good [made things even worse](#). Blow-back from residents and civil libertarians had led Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles to shut down hot-spots programs. Now that unbearable violence is back, each city has dug out that bad old approach, renamed it ("Operation Legend") and dressed it up in new finery. And so the cycle begins anew.

Alas, even the most skillfully applied enforcement strategies can't remedy the root causes of the crime and disorder that bedevil low-income neighborhoods. Getting there would require a skillful and exceedingly well-funded application of "[social disorganization](#)" theory. But there seems to be little interest in either Red or Blue political quarters for that "[Marshall Plan](#)" we've hollered about. Not that there haven't been some promising moves. "[Place Matters](#)" mentioned [Birmingham's \(Ala.\) comprehensive program](#). One of its components, the "[Promise Initiative](#)," provides

apprenticeships to high-school juniors and seniors and offers tuition help to those bound for college.

So wait a minute. Is there a role for police here, as well? Can cops help impoverished societies transform? LAPD says yes! Its decade-old “[Community Safety Partnership](#)” program (CSP) has placed teams of mostly minority officers in seven of the city’s low-income housing projects. CSP officers work in uniform but don’t typically conduct criminal investigations or make arrests. They interact with residents, participate in group activities, enable the “safe passage” of youths to and from school, and provide one-on-one counseling and referrals. [An external evaluation](#) by a UCLA researcher, CSP locations enjoy less crime. As one might expect, the constant presence of police “disrupts” gangs and enhances the ability of residents “to gather and enjoy public spaces, facilities, and programs.” However, another [favorable but less glowing review](#) cautioned that despite CSP, “residents generally do not trust the police and expressed concerns about mistreatment, including a lack of anonymity when reporting crimes.”

Seizing the moment, LAPD just transformed CSP into its own Bureau under the leadership of a Deputy Chief. But not everyone’s happy. Indeed, the notion that police should increase their sphere of influence [has badly divided the Blues](#). Connie Rice, the well-known Black civil-rights lawyer who helped found CSP, [praised its expansion](#): “warrior enforcement culture needs to be replaced with this kind of guardian-style approach that rewards problem-solving engagement between officers and the communities they protect.” Her pointedly guarded language didn’t do the trick. No sale, said Paula Minor of “Black Lives Matter L.A.”: “This [CSP] is not a program that needs to be operated by armed, sworn police officers.” Her views were seconded by Hamid Khan. A well-regarded activist who leads the “[Stop LAPD Spying Coalition](#),” he argued that [funds should be redirected](#) from the police to community programs.

It’s already happened. On July 1st. the L.A. City Council [stripped \\$150 million](#) from LAPD’s billion-plus budget, sharply cutting overtime and ultimately reducing officer staffing by 231 positions. These funds are now destined for minority communities; one proposed use is a youth summer jobs program. LAPD managers are caught square in the horns of a dilemma. Violence is up, and officers must continue to face the task of cleaning up the “symptoms” of the social disorganization that characterizes low-income neighborhoods. If attempts such as CSP to treat “the whole patient” are to expand, cops must come from somewhere. So far, CSP’s been funded by outside donors. Will that continue? And if so, would those who feel the cure (policing) is worse than the disease (violent crime) tolerate an *increased* police presence?

That ending’s still being written.

THE USUAL VICTIMS

Violent crime is reportedly way up. But do we all suffer equally?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. According to the the *Los Angeles Times*, 2020 was “a year like no other.” Murder, it breathlessly reported, hit “a decade high after years of sustained reductions,” and shootings soared nearly forty percent. But L.A.’s hardly alone. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the toll in perennially lethal Cook County [hit a historic high](#), with “more gun-related homicides in 2020 than any other year, surpassing the previous record set in 1994.” Even New York City, which habitually boasts about its low crime numbers, feels cause for alarm. A recent *New York Times* opinion piece, “The Homicide Spike is Real,” calls killings and shootings “[the city’s second-biggest challenge](#)” next to the pandemic. But when it comes to gunplay “the way forward is less clear, and the prospects for a better 2021 are much dimmer.”



Check out the graph. Homicide in Chicago increased *fifty-six percent* in 2020, soaring from an already deplorable 492 killings to an eye-popping 769 (the per/100,000

rate jumped from 18.2 to 28.5). While perhaps less mind-bending, increases in Los Angeles (38 percent) and New York City (45 percent) were also pronounced. Indeed, violence surged in large cities and small.

So our first question is...*why*?

Two major reasons have been offered: the pandemic, and police killings. These dreadful events have led to economic chaos and social unrest, impairing the functioning of the state and fracturing its connection with the citizens it ostensibly serves. Not only has the pandemic taken cops off the street, but their deployment's been deeply affected as well. As the *Washington Post* noted, [this "thinning" of ranks](#) can have serious consequences:

In many departments, police ranks were thinned significantly by the combined effect of officers being out sick and being assigned to manage unrest on the streets. And given the concerns about spreading the coronavirus, officers were going to fewer places and interacting with fewer people, allowing more opportunities for people to settle disputes themselves.

Chicago's new police superintendent, David Brown, [was brought in by Mayor Lori Lightfoot](#) to deal with the chaos. [He attributes](#) much of the increase in violence, to "extended periods of heightened civil unrest and looting" that were sparked by [George Floyd's death](#) at the hands of Minneapolis police. It's not just about Mr. Floyd. [Noted criminologist Richard Rosenfeld](#) believes that our legacy of lethal police-citizen encounters has actually damaged the state's moral authority:

During a period of widespread intense protest against police violence, it's fair to suppose that police legitimacy deteriorates, especially in those communities that have always had a fraught relationship with police. That simply widens the space for so-called street justice to take hold, and my own view is that is a part of what we are seeing.

Considering just their reaction to COVID-19 constraints, it's clear that some citizens have become less willing to comply. Eager to avoid conflict, and with fewer officers to spare, many agencies have severely pared back on enforcement. [Aggressive, focused approaches](#) such as "hot spots policing" and "stop-and-frisk" seem threatened with extinction. LAPD Captain Paul Vernon, who runs his agency's Compstat unit, feels that this purposeful pulling back has reduced gang members' fear of being caught and [led to more shootings and killings](#). What's more, some cops may be reacting to the "new normal" by purposely slowing down. According to the *New York Times*, [that's exactly what happened](#) in the Big Apple. If so, it's not a new phenomenon. Three years ago in

“[Police Slowdowns](#)” we wrote about the protracted slowdown that followed the arrest and prosecution of a handful of Baltimore’s finest after the 2015 death of Freddie Gray. (Ditto, Chicago and Minneapolis.)

Whatever its causes, the decline in proactivity has serious implications. In his recent paper, “[Explaining the Recent Homicide Spikes in U.S. Cities](#),” Professor Paul G. Cassell proposed the “Minneapolis Effect”:

Specifically, law enforcement agencies have been forced to divert resources from normal policing to patrolling demonstrations. And even as the anti-police protests have abated, police officers have scaled back on proactive or officer-initiated law enforcement, such as street stops and other forms of policing designed to prevent firearms crimes.

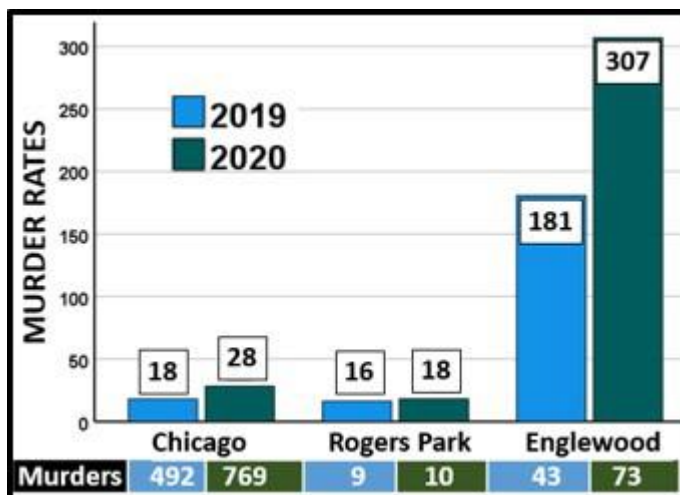
Of course, it’s not just about policing. Folks have suffered from the closing of schools, parks and libraries. Chicago P.D. Sgt. Jermain Harris, who works with youths, [offers his take on what happens](#) when community supports disappear:

You take away the businesses, all the pieces of society that generally have eyes out, and you are left with young people, and a lot of young people, who don’t have resources or that level of support if they are left on their own.

Well, it all seems plausible enough. Yet your blogger, and probably most who skim through our essays, lives in a middle-class area that seems just as peaceful as before the madness began. Other than the officer who lives a few houses down, cops are hardly ever around, and their absence is thought unremarkable. So that brings us to the second question: *who* suffers most?

LAPD Chief Michel Moore knows. He recently pointed out that in L.A., the increase of violence has mostly affected areas [long beset by gangs and gunplay](#):

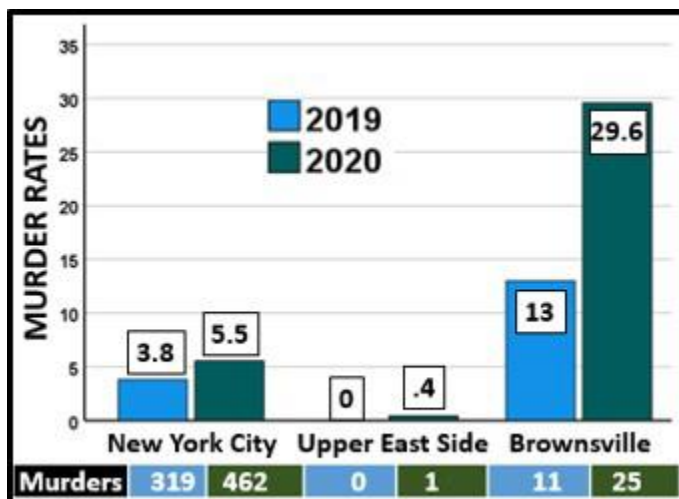
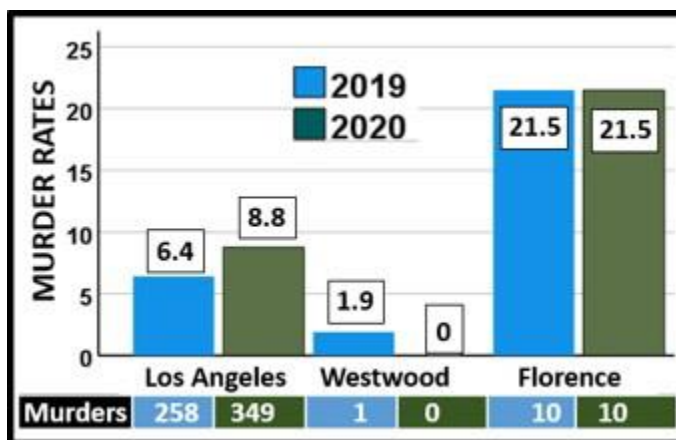
Nearly all of the loss of life and shooting victims are centered in the Black and brown communities. The lack of jobs and supportive services, a sense of hopelessness, easy access to firearms and ineffective parts of the criminal justice system have created a perfect storm to undermine public safety gains built over the last decade.



Chief Moore is referring to the same poor neighborhoods whose chronic problems with crime and violence are the stock-in-trade of our [Neighborhoods special section](#). Bottom line: it's not about *cities* but about the [places within cities](#) where people live. This graph proves that (as we suggested in "[Mission Impossible?](#)") there are even some relatively safe spots in...Chicago! For instance, Rogers Park, Chicago PD District 24. [Its 2020 murder rate](#) (thru 12/27) was more than a third lower than

the Windy City's overall. Yet [in downtrodden Englewood](#), Chicago's P.D.'s 7th. District, the already sky-high 2019 rate soared *seventy percent*.

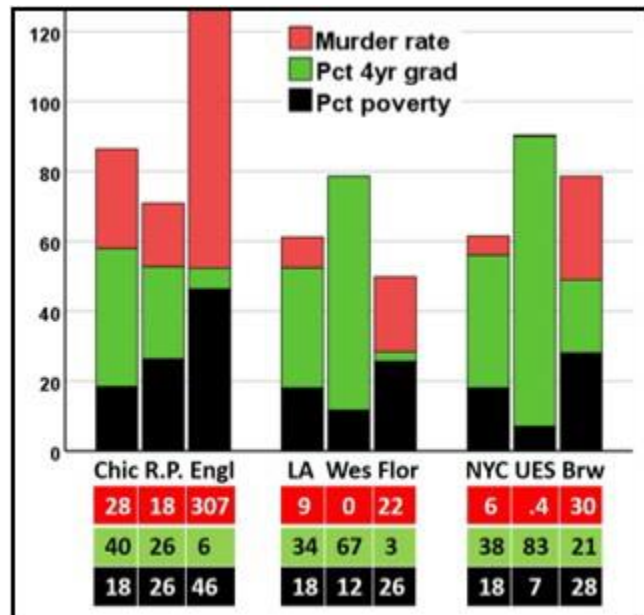
In "[Location, Location, Location](#)" we mentioned that Los Angeles has a number of relatively safe spaces. Say, Westwood. Populated by about fifty thousand of the (mostly) well-to-do, the prosperous community suffered one murder in [2019](#) and none in [2020](#). Alas, most L.A. residents aren't nearly as fortunate. Consider the chronically troubled Florence area (pop. 46,610) of South L.A. With ten killings in [2019](#) and ten in [2020](#), its murder rate wound up more than twice that of the city as a whole.



Conditions in New York city also "depend." Contrast, for example, the affluent Upper East Side's (pop. 225,914) zero murders in [2019](#) and one in [2020](#) with bedraggled Brownsville's (pop. 84, 525) eleven killings in [2019](#) and twenty-five in [2020](#). To be sure, Brownsville seems a less threatening place than L.A.'s Florence district or Chicago's

Englewood. Yet its contrast to the rest of the city within which its borders lie seems equally pronounced. It's as though there are two cities: one comprises Rogers Park, Westwood and the Upper East Side, and the other is made up of Englewood, Florence and Brownsville.

This graph brings it all together using 2020 data. (To save space, Englewood's sky-high murder rate runs off the top.) It's no news to our readers that economic conditions and their correlates – here we use number of residents with four-year degrees – are deeply related to crime and violence. So what can be done? Prior posts in our [“Neighborhoods”](#) section have rooted for comprehensive approaches that offer residents of low-income communities job training, tutoring, child care and other critical services.



Grab a quick look at [“Place Matters.”](#) Whether it comes from “neighborhood revitalization” programs such as promoted by Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin, or from that “Marshall Plan” we ceaselessly harp about, there’s no question – none – that a concerted effort to give needy neighborhoods a boost would greatly improve their socioeconomic health and reap fabulous human benefits. And, not-so-incidentally, keep inhabitants from becoming the “usual victims” whose demise our posts persistently quantify.

Violence is not an equal-opportunity threat. But of course we all knew that.

Posted 10/12/24

WANT BROTHERLY LOVE? DON'T BE POOR!

Violence is down in Philly, L.A. and D.C. Have their poor noticed?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Crime is reportedly down across the U.S. Comparisons between 2022-2023 reveal improvements in many violence-beset cities. Say, Philadelphia, where homicides plunged from 514 to 410. Less crime-struck places also got better. Murders fell from 438 to 386 in New York City and from 391 to 329 in Los Angeles.

Yes, crime and violence have fluctuated over time. Spikes in violence brought on by the pandemic continue to affect large metropolitan areas. While Philadelphia residents seem much better off today than in 2021, when they endured 562 homicides, The City of Brotherly Love had “only” 280 killings in 2015. Still, 104 fewer residents lost their lives last year. That’s inherently meaningful. And the seemingly favorable trend continues. [According to the City Controller](#), in 2024 Philadelphia experienced 193 fatal shootings thru October 2. That’s a stunning 42 percent fewer than on that day in 2023.

FIVE MOST AFFLUENT PHILADELPHIA ZIP'S							FIVE POOREST PHILADELPHIA ZIP'S						
			2023		2024					2023		2024	
			Full year		Thru 9/30					Full year		Thru 9/30	
	Pop	Pov	Shtgs	Rate	Shtgs	Rate		Pop	Pov	Shtgs	Rate	Shtgs	Rate
19106	13064	5.4	4	30.6	2	15.3	19133	25798	36.9	82	317.9	47	182.2
19154	34552	7.3	5	14.5	0	0.0	19121	33708	38.9	96	284.8	38	112.7
19128	38314	8.7	1	2.6	3	7.8	19134	59230	39.4	164	276.9	59	99.6
19147	39237	8.7	17	43.3	2	5.1	19140	53979	40.6	133	246.4	61	113.0
19114	31468	9	3	9.5	1	3.2	19104	38774	40.8	46	118.6	35	90.3
	156635	7.8	30	19.2	8	5.1		211489	39.3	521	246.3	240	113.5

Problem is, the benefits aren’t equally distributed. [In 2023](#) Philadelphia suffered 1,666 “criminal shootings” (375 fatal; 1,291 nonfatal; fatal.) across its 45 ZIP Codes. The

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five most prosperous ZIP's (left table, bottom row), [average poverty 7.8 percent](#), suffered a cumulative 30 shootings, producing a rate of 19.2 per/100,000 residents. In contrast, the five neediest ZIP's (right table, bottom row), average poverty 39.3 percent, endured a stunning 521 shootings. Philadelphia's most economically-deprived residents were burdened with a per/100,000 pop. shooting rate of 246.3, *nearly thirteen times worse* than what their counterparts experienced.

And what about 2024? According to the Controller, the city suffered 838 shootings thru Sept. 30, 2024 (174 were fatal; 664 were nonfatal.) That's about *half* the total number of shootings in 2023, so the trend seems favorable. Alas, benefits remained unequally distributed. Through Sept. 30, the five most prosperous ZIP's had 8 shootings, producing a nine-month rate of 5.1 per/100,000. Their five counterparts suffered a grisly 240 shootings, yielding a nine-month rate of 113.5. That's *more than twenty-two times* worse.

Who *really* profits from "the great crime drop"? After all, income-based disparities are by no means unique to Philadelphia. Los Angeles is served by twenty-one geographical police Divisions. They suffered a total of 329 homicides in 2023. Murder rates for each Division were computed using LAPD's [2023 homicide report](#), its [Division population counts](#) and [Census poverty data](#).

FIVE MOST AFFLUENT LAPD DIVISIONS							FIVE POOREST LAPD DIVISIONS						
			2023		2024					2023		2024	
			Full year		Thru 9/7					Full year		Thru 9/7	
Div	Pop	Pov	Homs	Rate	Homs	Rate	Div	Pop	Pov	Homs	Rate	Homs	Rate
Pac.	218686	7.2	10	4.6	4	1.8	Ram.	159878	23.1	20	12.5	19	11.9
Foot.	196318	10.2	10	5.1	6	3.1	SE	150720	23.7	38	25.2	25	16.6
WLA	242928	10.3	3	1.2	1	0.4	SW	193652	24	14	7.2	10	5.2
WVa.	201893	10.5	8	4.0	3	1.5	Cen.	81747	25.9	29	35.5	14	17.1
Dev.	230518	10.8	7	3.0	7	3.0	New.	149495	36.3	24	16.1	22	14.7
	1090343	9.8	38	3.5	21	1.9		735492	26.6	125	17.0	90	12.2

Comparing the five LAPD Divisions at each end of the prosperity scale yields a contrast that's shades of Philly. In 2023 LAPD's five most prosperous Divisions, Pacific, Foothill, West L.A., West Valley and Devonshire (left table, bottom row), avg. poverty 9.8 percent, suffered an aggregate 38 homicides. That produced a murder rate of 3.5 per/100,000 residents. In sharp contrast, the five Divisions at the other end of the wealth scale, Rampart, Southeast, Southwest, Central and Newton (right table, bottom row), avg. poverty 26.6 percent, suffered 125 murders. That yields a homicide rate of 17 per/100,000, *nearly five times worse*. Like Philly, these hazards to life and limb

continued into 2024. Although the number of homicides has trended down, the difference in the burden between affluent and poor *increased to six-times-plus* (respective rates 1.9 and 12.2).

Ditto, the District of Columbia. [In 2023](#) its eight Wards endured a nearly lock-step relationship between poverty and homicide. Its four most affluent Wards (left table, bottom row), average poverty 5.1 percent, suffered an aggregate murder rate of 14.8 per/100,000 residents. In contrast, the four Wards on the economically-downtrodden extreme (right table, bottom row), average poverty 14.1 percent, endured a stunning homicide rate of 65.2 per/100,000. *That's more than four times worse*. And while homicide seems to be substantially down in 2024, the poorer Wards continue to struggle with a murder rate that's *four times higher* (partial-year rates 9.4 v. 37.7).

FOUR MOST AFFLUENT D.C. WARDS							FOUR POOREST D.C. WARDS						
			2023		2024					2023		2024	
			Full year		Thru 10/11					Full year		Thru 10/11	
Ward	Pop	Pov	Homs	Rate	Homs	Rate	Ward	Pop	Pov	Homs	Rate	Homs	Rate
3	77813	2	1	1.3	2	2.6	5	88965	7.5	33	37.1	21	23.6
2	83162	4.8	11	13.2	10	12.0	1	83885	7.9	27	32.2	11	13.1
4	83103	6.6	16	19.3	12	14.4	7	74561	20.5	51	68.4	40	53.6
6	106206	7.1	24	22.6	9	8.5	8	73200	20.5	98	133.9	49	66.9
	350284	5.1	52	14.8	33	9.4		320611	14.1	209	65.2	121	37.7

In March, 2023 Philadelphia's [Lenfest Institute for Journalism](#) published the results of a community poll about the issues facing the city. "Crime and public safety" topped the list of citizen concerns. Black persons and residents of the city's less-prosperous areas were far more likely to complain about the effects of gun violence. Ditto, Los Angeles. After an outbreak of shootings in the chronically poor, violence-beset Watts area last year, [the leader of an L.A. peace coalition](#) told the *Los Angeles Times* that citywide drops in violence "don't necessarily reflect our reality." His views were echoed by a gang interventionist. "It's time for our children to be able to play outside, be able to walk to and from school safely...This isn't a color thing."

What can be done? Post-George Floyd, tactics such as stop-and-frisk have fallen out of favor. While some beleaguered places (i.e., Philadelphia, L.A. and D.C.) have embarked on a cautious re-set, aggressively policing violence-stricken neighborhoods inevitably leads to tangles with citizens. Officers *are* human, and frequently clashing with non-compliant souls can cause them to form stereotypes and develop attitudes [that potentially distort all encounters](#). Black and Hispanic persons, who disproportionately inhabit poorer areas, are inevitably affected.

Improving the safety of economically-fraught neighborhoods clearly calls for a lot more than policing. L.A.'s impacted Watts residents offered two fixes: jobs and the economy. [A landmark study by the Urban Institute](#) found that properly addressing “distressed urban neighborhoods” requires a concerted effort to provide educational opportunities, job training, housing, child care, and the physical and mental health supports that are crucial to well-being. So here's an idea. It's become commonplace to partner officers with mental health professionals. Why not get social workers to ride along, as well? Once an immediate problem is under control, a knowledgeable specialist can assess things and start the complex and demanding process of getting a family – and its misbehaving members – the assistance they need.

Improving the dynamics of urban areas requires that we look *within*. “Cities” are constructs. [As we've repeatedly emphasized](#), it's *neighborhoods* that really, really matter. So let's start there!

Posted 6/30/23; edited 7/1/23

WATCHING THE WATCHERS

Will sanctioning its cops bring Minneapolis back?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Not long before their Third District colleagues tangled with George Floyd, a couple of officers from Minneapolis PD’s Fourth District [festooned the Christmas tree that graced their precinct's lobby](#) with some unusual ornaments: “a pack of menthol cigarettes, a can of Steel Reserve malt liquor, police tape, a bag of Takis snacks and a cup from Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen.” [Described as “super racist stuff”](#) by Mayor Jacob Frey, these unusual decorations upset more than a few citizens. And ultimately led to the suspension of one of the cops, the retirement of his partner, and the demotion of two of their bosses.

As one might expect, the incident was juicy fodder for the media. But it didn’t hold a candle to the tragedy that came five months later. And one year after *that*, on the day following the conviction of ex-MPD cop Derek Chauvin for murdering Mr. Floyd, the Department of Justice launched a “patterns or practices” investigation of Minneapolis P.D. [Its recently released report](#) paints a grim picture of how MPD officers treated citizens, and particularly members of racial and ethnic minorities. [According to Attorney General Merrick Garland](#), MPD officers “routinely disregard the safety of people in their custody” and “fail to intervene to prevent unreasonable use of force by other officers.” They reportedly mistreat persons suffering from behavioral disorders, violate free-speech rights, and discriminate against Black and Native American persons. (And yes, those Christmas ornaments get prominent mention. See pg. 46.) Here’s an extract from the report’s opening page:



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For years, MPD used dangerous techniques and weapons against people who committed at most a petty offense and sometimes no offense at all. MPD used force to punish people who made officers angry or criticized the police. MPD patrolled neighborhoods differently based on their racial composition and discriminated based on race when searching, handcuffing, or using force against people during stops.

George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020. Our initial account, "[Punishment Isn't a Cop's Job](#)," was posted on June 3rd. Three weeks later we followed up with an [in-depth assessment](#) of poverty and crime in Minneapolis. Focused on the year preceding the tragic encounter, our analysis revealed a profound relationship between income, race and violence. A comparo between four neighborhoods at each end of the violent crime continuum reflected what we've found elsewhere: as prosperity increases, so does the proportion of White residents. Meanwhile violence goes down.

Of course, the link between poverty and violence is well known. Our [neighborhoods essays](#) frequently roll out data illustrating that relationship throughout urban America. And cops must deal with the consequences every day. Minneapolis' economic disparities were no secret to the authors of DOJ's report (pp. 3-4):

The metropolitan area that includes Minneapolis and neighboring St. Paul known as the Twin Cities has some of the nation's starkest racial disparities on economic measures, including income, homeownership, poverty, unemployment, and educational attainment... The median Black family in the Twin Cities earns just 44% as much as the median white family, and the poverty rate among Black households is nearly five times higher than the rate among white households...

According to DOJ, Black and Native Americans aren't simply poorer. They're also far more likely to be stopped by police. A graph shows that MPD makes proportionally fewer traffic enforcement stops as the proportion of White residents increases (pg. 34). Neighborhoods "with fewer white people" are reportedly beset by pretextual stops that MPD uses to find guns and combat violence. Searches of Black persons are disproportionately frequent. Race and ethnicity aside, the role of place doesn't come up until page 40, when it's reported that officers in two of the city's five police precincts use far more force against Blacks and Native Americans than against Whites during stops:

Compared to white people behaving similarly, Black people stopped by MPD are subjected to:

- 22% more searches
- 37% more vehicle searches
- 24% more uses of force

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For example, from May 25, 2020, to August 9, 2022, in the Third Precinct where many Native Americans live and where supervisors told us the cowboys want to work MPD used force 49% more often during stops involving Black people and 69% more often during stops involving Native American people than they did during similar stops involving white people. And during that same period, officers in the predominantly white Fifth Precinct used force against Black people 44% more often than against white people during similar stops.

Still, other than noting that “MPD has often used a strategy known as ‘pretext’ stops to address crime,” (p. 34), the report was mum about what that “crime” actually looks like. Offending and its distribution across the city get no mention. In a report that ostensibly seeks to assess why Minneapolis’ cops act as they do, the quantity and nature of the criminal incidents to which they respond would seem pertinent. But they’re ignored.

A thorough reckoning of the environment in which Minneapolis cops labor was clearly not part of DOJ’s game plan. But it’s what we set out to do. Minneapolis’ five police precincts (“Districts”) service eighty-seven neighborhoods. Leaving aside the University of Minnesota and three industrial areas, we collected data on eighty-three. Demographics are from the city’s official [“demographics dashboard”](#). Crime data is from the [“crime dashboard”](#). We downloaded data on all crimes between January 1, 2019 and June 15, 2023 that were coded as murder/non-negligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, robbery, and kidnapping. Our process produced unofficial violence rates per 10,000 population. This table summarizes the findings:

Precincts					Neighborhoods		
Precinct no.	Pop	Pct. poverty	Pct. non-White	Viol/10K 2022 rate	# per precinct	Poverty range	Viol rate 2022 range
1	43304	26	42	774	6	9-50	106.5-413.1
2	70014	26	30	418	17	4-47	8.7-240.1
3	126743	15	42	1395	26	1-38	0-356.3
4	71106	24	70	1439	14	3-33	27.6-466.5
5	106584	10	26	854	20	2-25	2.7-269

Minneapolis’ five precincts exhibit dramatic differences in economics and violent crime. The First, Second and Fourth have overall poverty rates that are more than twice those of the privileged Fifth. Yet the Fifth nonetheless sports a substantial violence rate. Looking within, it turns out that three of its neighborhoods (Lyndale, Steven’s Square and Whittier) are burdened with poverty scores in the twenties. These and other within-precinct differences led us to set them aside and focus on neighborhoods.

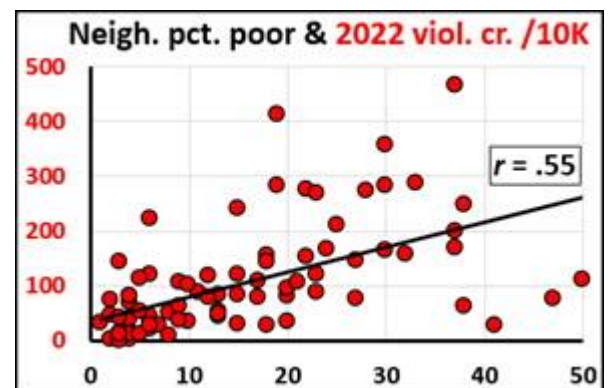
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Our present inquiry covers the period between 2019 and June, 2023. We begin with yearly comparisons of five neighborhoods at each end of the violence spectrum. (For 2023 that's a part-year rate). Lowest-violence neighborhoods are depicted in the top table, and highest-violence neighborhoods are in the bottom table. Each is coded for violence rate and percent of residents in poverty. Their differences - and its consistency - is truly astounding. Violence and poverty are literally locked in an embrace. (According to the [2021 ACS](#), Minneapolis' citywide poverty rate was 15%).

MPLS. NEIGHS WITH 5 LOWEST VIOL CR RATES/10K – PCT. IN POVERTY														
2019	Rate	Pov	2020	Rate	Pov	2021	Rate	Pov	2022	Rate	Pov	Part 2023	Rate	Pov
Page	5	3	Kenny	5	2	Kenny	5	2	Page	0	3	Beltrami	0	13
Hale	6	4	Lynnhurst	6	3	Lynnhurst	6	3	Kenny	3	2	Page	0	3
Lynnhurst	6	3	Fulton	10	4	Fulton	9	4	Fulton	3	4	Lynnhurst	2	3
Fulton	7	4	Armatage	11	4	Hale	12	4	Lynnhurst	3	3	Kenny	3	2
Field	8	6	St. Anth E	13	13	Linden Hil	14	3	Diamd Lk	6	4	Ericsson	3	4
Average	7	4		9	5		9	3		3	3		1	5

MPLS. NEIGHS WITH 5 HIGHEST VIOL CR RATES/10K – PCT. IN POVERTY														
2019	Rate	Pov	2020	Rate	Pov	2021	Rate	Pov	2022	Rate	Pov	Part 2023	Rate	Pov
McKinley	258	22	Downtn W	317	19	McKinley	336	22	Folwell	282	19	Downtn W	115	19
Folwell	270	19	E Phillips	344	30	Jordan	341	30	Near North	287	33	Stv Square	123	23
E Phillips	278	30	McKinley	350	22	Downtn W	403	19	E Phillips	356	30	Midtn Phill	136	28
Downtn W	467	19	Jordan	351	30	E Phillips	418	30	Downtn W	413	19	E Phillips	171	30
Hawthorn	476	37	Hawthorn	591	37	Hawthorn	518	37	Hawthorn	467	37	Hawthorn	175	37
Average	350	25		391	28		403	28		361	28		144	27

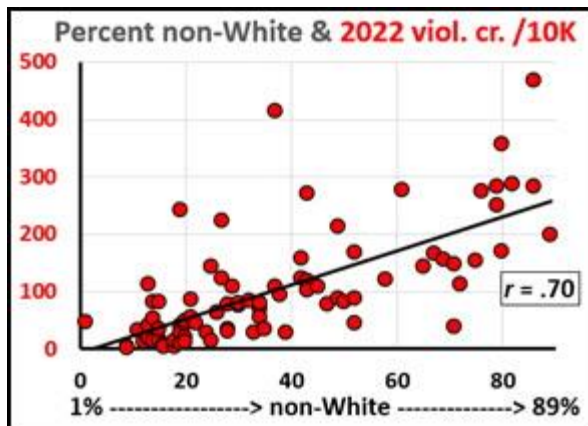
This scattergram depicts the relationship between percent in poverty (horiz. axis) and 2022 violent crime rate (vert. axis) for the 83 neighborhoods under study (each is represented with a red dot). The “r” statistic ranges from zero, meaning no relationship, to one, which means that the variables (percent poor and the violent crime rate) are in perfect sync. While there are outliers, that *r* of .55 reflects a pronounced tendency for poverty and violence to go up and down together.



DOJ's report complains that MPD officers unjustly pick on non-Whites. But could other factors be contributing? Say, higher rates of violence in lower-income neighborhoods? Below are repeat comparos between low and high-violence neighborhoods, but with percentage of non-White residents instead of poverty rates.

MPLS. NEIGHS WITH 5 LOWEST VIOL CR RATES/10K – PCT. NON-WHITE (NW)														
2019	Rate	NW	2020	Rate	NW	2021	Rate	NW	2022	Rate	NW	Part 2023	Rate	NW
Page	5	9	Kenny	5	18	Kenny	5	18	Page	0	9	Beltrami	0	52
Hale	6	14	Lynnhurst	6	16	Lynnhurst	6	16	Kenny	3	18	Page	0	9
Lynnhurst	6	16	Fulton	10	9	Fulton	9	9	Fulton	3	9	Lynnhurst	2	16
Fulton	7	9	Armatage	11	15	Hale	12	14	Lynnhurst	3	16	Kenny	3	18
Field	8	22	St. Anth E	13	34	Linden Hil	14	18	Diamd Lk	6	16	Ericsson	3	13
Average	7	14		9	18		9	15		3	14		1	22

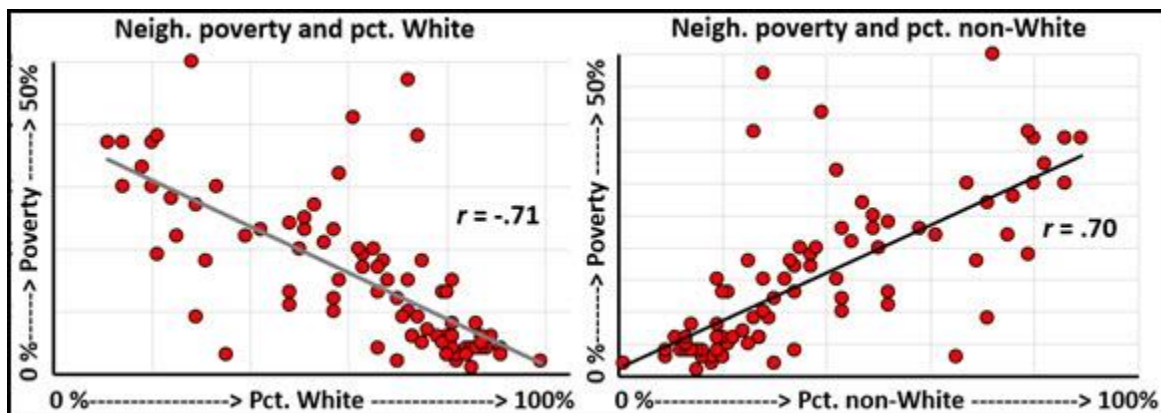
MPLS. NEIGHS WITH 5 HIGHEST VIOL CR RATES/10K – PCT. NON-WHITE (NW)														
2019	Rate	NW	2020	Rate	NW	2021	Rate	NW	2022	Rate	NW	Part 2023	Rate	NW
McKinley	258	61	Downtn W	317	37	McKinley	336	61	Folwell	282	79	Downtn W	115	37
Folwell	270	79	E Phillips	344	80	Jordan	341	86	Near North	287	82	Stv Square	123	43
E Phillips	278	80	McKinley	350	61	Downtn W	403	37	E Phillips	356	80	Midtn Phill	136	76
Downtn W	467	37	Jordan	351	86	E Phillips	418	80	Downtn W	413	37	E Phillips	171	80
Hawthorn	476	86	Hawthorn	591	86	Hawthorn	518	86	Hawthorn	467	86	Hawthorn	175	86
Average	350	69		391	70		403	70		361	73		144	64



Again, there are exceptions. Note, for example, Beltrami's zero violence score in 2023. But violent crime rates clearly trend high where non-Whites abound. Check out the scattergram. At $r = .70$ the relationship between violence and percent non-White is undeniably pronounced.

We don't argue that some Minneapolis officers shouldn't be wearing a badge. There's a reason why our original post about

George Floyd, which came out one week after the incident, was entitled "[Punishment Isn't a Cop's Job](#)." Yet considering poverty's relationship with violence, ignoring its role does no one any favors. And in Minneapolis, the economic circumstances of many non-Whites are indeed bleak:



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Not-so-incidentally, that intimate connection between poverty and violence, which the Feds ignored, is no secret to Minneapolis' residents. We regularly update "[Don't Divest' – Invest!](#)", our follow-on essay about George Floyd, with relevant news clips about the troubled city. Here's a sampling (most recent first):

- **5/5/23** Violence-ridden Minneapolis [is beset by three street gangs](#): the "Lows," the "Highs", and the "Bloods". On May 3 DOJ unsealed indictments charging thirty members of the "Highs" and the "Bloods" with a RICO conspiracy to commit murder and robbery and to traffic in drugs. Fifteen additional members are charged with Federal gun and drug violations. A like indictment naming the "Lows" is anticipated
- **12/22/22** Residents of a subsidized apartment complex in Minneapolis' working-class Cedar-Riverside neighborhood [blame an "explosion of Fentanyl"](#) and a profusion of homeless encampments for break-ins and shootings that have made life unpleasant and all-too-often, treacherous. Despite hiring a security guard and adding more cameras, "I'm just not sure we're making up any ground," says a property manager. "Every night there's something new."
- **8/27/22** Black people account for about 19 percent of Minneapolis residents. [Yet 83 percent of shooting victims so far this year](#) have been Black, as have 89 percent of known shooters. "That makes sense," said City Council member LaTrisha Vetaw, who is Black, as the shootings are taking place in "underserved communities" predominantly inhabited by Black persons.
- **8/5/22** Minneapolis' "Downtown West," a busy district with concert venues and official buildings, enjoyed a reprieve from crime as activity decreased during the pandemic. But as things get back to "normal," [crime and violence have returned](#) with a vengeance. So far this year violent crime is 25 percent higher than in 2021, gunfire is up 40 percent, and property crimes have soared 65 percent. Police staffing, though, is way down; the downtown precinct has 49 only cops on patrol versus 81 in 2020.

Full stop. As that May 5, 2023 update suggests, not everyone in DOJ has focused their angst on the cops. Check out its [recent announcement](#) about the Federal indictment of dozens of Minneapolis gang members who wreaked havoc in the city's impoverished neighborhoods: "The most vulnerable in our communities are often those most impacted by gun violence and criminal gang activity. Our most vulnerable residents are entitled to the same protections and safety as everyone else in society."

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Still, whether it's police or the Feds, law enforcement is inevitably after-the-fact. Even when well done it's often too little, too late. What's really necessary is what we've called on for the last decade-and-a-half. Here's our favorite outtake from "[Fix Those Neighborhoods!](#)":

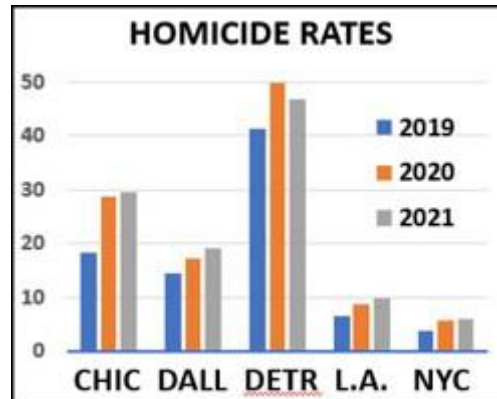
Yet no matter how well it's done, policing is clearly not the ultimate solution. Preventing violence is a task for society. As we've repeatedly pitched, a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities, language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing could yield vast benefits.

That's an issue that cuts across national boundaries. Consider the current turmoil in France, which is beset by riots and looting that were sparked by the [July 27 police shooting death](#) of a 17-year old who tried to drive off after a traffic stop. His killing, in a poverty-stricken area of the Paris suburb of Nanterre, was "the lighter that ignited the gas. Hopeless young people were waiting for it. We lack housing and jobs, and when we have (jobs), our wages are too low." Those were the words of a resident of nearby Clichy, where [a notorious 2005 police encounter](#) led to the deaths of two poor youths and set off weeks of rioting. A decade-plus later, France would break out in riots sparked by the murder of George Floyd. [According to the New York Times](#), "France is fractured between its affluent metropolitan elites...and low-income communities in blighted, racially mixed suburbs where schools tend to be poor and prospects dim." French police killed 13 motorists in 2022 and three including the youth this year; the officer who shot him was promptly arrested and charged with homicide.

To be sure, cops differ. "[Third, Fourth and Fifth Chances](#)" emphasized that troubled officers require prompt attention. (Derek Chauvin isn't the first MPD officer whose dodgy conduct was overlooked until it was too late. Check out "[A Risky and Informed Decision](#)", our 2021 piece about ex-cop Mohamed Noor.) So by all means, don't abandon sincere efforts at police reform. But keep in mind that they're no substitute for the funding and hard work that are urgently needed to restore sanity to low-income neighborhoods.

And we don't just mean in Minneapolis.

Posted 1/31/22

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

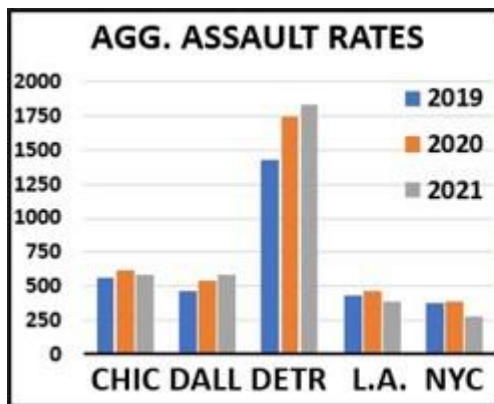
let’s turn to five major cities – Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles and New York City – to assess whether a “crime wave” really exists.

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.)

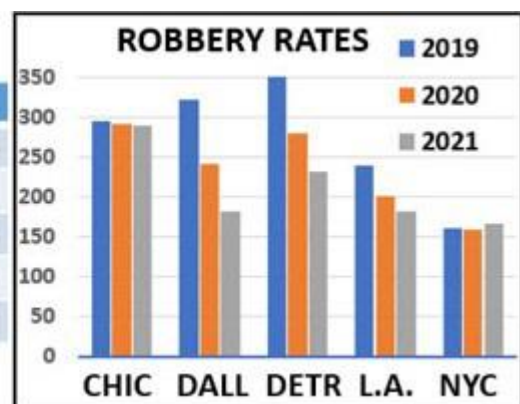
Clearly, each city endured substantial increases in murder. Detroit's numbers are truly deplorable, Chicago's a bit less so. Still, note that 57 percent increase in murders for 2020. Los Angeles and New York City, which started off and ended in a far better place, also experienced substantial increases 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

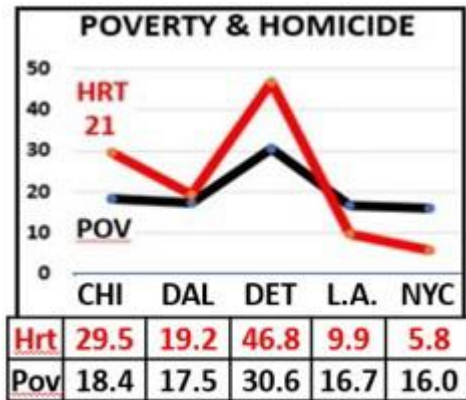
While America is decidedly on the wrong track homicide-wise, aggravated assault presents a more complex picture. Each city experienced a substantial increase in 2020; Detroit's already sky-high figures surged 21.7 percent. And while the Motor City and Dallas endured another jump in 2021, Chicago, Los 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).

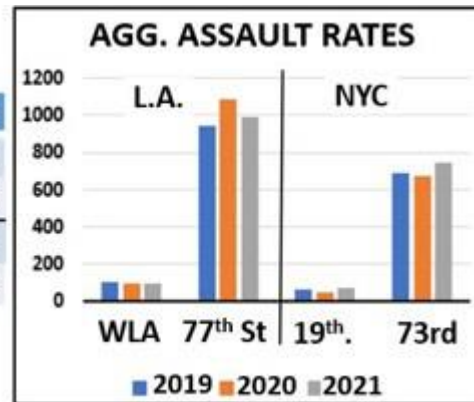
City boundaries are artificial constructs. What about neighborhoods, the places where people actually live? Patterning our efforts on [“The Usual Victims”](#), [“Woke up, America!”](#) and [“Fix Those Neighborhoods!”](#) we collected 2019-2021 data on homicide, aggravated assault and robbery for two 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

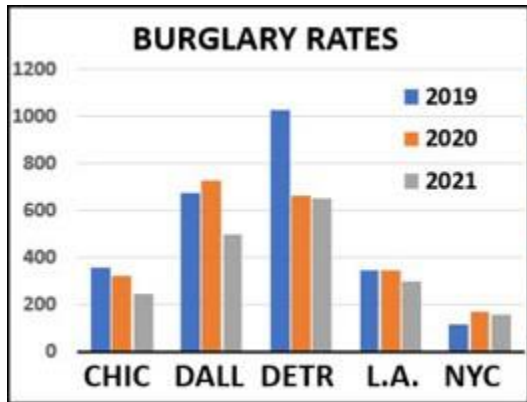
Div	%pov	2019	Rate	2020	Rate	2021	Rate
WLA	11.3	229	100.4	218	96	221	96.9
77th	30.7	1644	939.4	1903	1087	1726	986.2
19th	7.2	138	62.7	113	51	152	69.1
73rd	29.4	592	688.4	580	674	640	744.2



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.



	%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

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.

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.

Posted 12/23/21

WHAT'S UP WITH *POLICING*?

After one and one-half decades it seems that everything's changed. And nothing.



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Would *you* accept candy from this cop? *Sans* the holiday treat, this perhaps forgettable image was the centerpiece of our banner for “Liberal Pig,” the blog’s name when we kicked things off in 2007. Alas, in academia-land (teaching was our then-gig) the oinker got little respect, so we promptly renamed the site. But our indifference to the ideological winds remains. So you can expect that this essay will as usual be rough on everyone, including the cops.

Incidentally, it’s also our *four-hundredth* post. Pop a cork!

So where have our peace-keepers landed? For a hint, let’s consider [Torrance](#). Located in the southwest corner of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the city of 143,592 residents ([2019 ACS](#)) seems a prosperous place. It boasts a robust household median income (\$93,492) and a low poverty level (6.9 percent) that have its immense neighbor (HMI \$62,142, pov. 18 percent) decidedly beat. Its crime rate is also comparatively modest. According to the FBI Crime Data Explorer’s “[offenses known to law enforcement](#)” download, Torrance had 2,935 property crimes and 274 violent crimes during 2020. Its property crime rate of 20.5/1,000 seems well in line with the [nation’s 19.6](#) and [L.A.’s 21.5](#). And its violent crime rate, 1.9, literally sparkles: it’s only *half* the national 4.0 and *less than one-third* L.A.’s eye-popping 7.2.

Thanks to Torrance’s favorable situation, its cops wouldn’t be expected to repeatedly come under Federal watch. Yet grab a look at that recent [searing editorial](#) in the *L.A. Times*. A “rot in the police culture” is how the blunt piece assesses things. And it’s not

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just about a single foul-up. Indeed, Torrance has been under the gun for more than *two decades*.

Torrance P.D.'s current predicament dates back to 1993, when the U.S. Justice Department [filed a lawsuit](#) alleging that the city's hiring process for police and firefighters unlawfully discriminated against Blacks, Hispanics and Asians. Torrance P.D.'s then-233 officer force had [three Blacks \(1.3%\), six Asians and fifteen Latinos \(6.4%\)](#). Fire department ranks were also minority-thin. What's more, the Feds alleged that this wasn't for a lack of candidates, but on purpose. Two aspects of the police hiring process were said to unfairly exclude minorities: the writing literacy exam and the background investigation. More ominously, the department was also accused of tolerating "a racially hostile environment" within its ranks.

It wasn't just Torrance. [DOJ had advanced similar allegations](#) against three other L.A.-area communities: El Monte, Alhambra and Pomona. Each ultimately settled with the Feds and paid damages to unsuccessful minority applicants. But although only one year had passed since the [1992 Los Angeles riots](#) highlighted the sorry state of police-minority relations, Torrance said "no" and dug in for a fight.

Promptly more stuff happened. [On May 27, 1994](#) three 17-year old boys from L.A. were in a car on their way home after celebrating graduation. Two, both Black, were in front, and the third, who was White, was lying down in the back. Their path took them through Torrance. Suddenly a police car began to follow. After a time, a pair of White officers stopped the teens for "defective taillight" and "seat belt" violations. According to the youths, the cops ordered them out at gunpoint and brutally searched them. (And we mean, *brutally*.) Their car was also searched but nothing was found, and ultimately all were let go.

What the cops didn't know was that one of the kids' parents was an assistant city attorney. A Federal lawsuit was promptly filed. It claimed that the stop and search were illegal and the force used was completely unnecessary. And as one pores through [the appellate decision](#), a strong whiff of racial animus is clearly evident:

...when the officers first decided to make a U-turn and follow the plaintiffs' car, all they had seen were two young African American males driving down a major boulevard in an unremarkable manner...The officer asked [the White teen] whether he knew the two black teens, whether they were actually his friends, and how long he had known them...No comparable questions were asked of the black plaintiffs. Instead, [the officer] asked [the Black teens] "What are you doing out here?" The officer also told [one of the Black teens] "You're not supposed to be here."

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That brought back the Department of Justice for another look. [And what they discovered wasn't pretty](#). Many Blacks were indeed leery of Torrance's cops. According to a local NAACP head, Torrance police had "one of the worst" reputations for "harassing minorities." Activists and civil libertarians considered the city's cops as "among the most racially biased and militaristic in Southern California." But Torrance officials disputed those assertions. Instead, they pointed to their community's relatively low crime rate and bragged about residents' "exceptionally high" support for the police. Mayor Dee Hardison agreed that good police departments do get "some heat from time to time." But she insisted that her cops made it all work. "We catch 'em, and the community likes that."

Perhaps so. But some former officers, including minority group members who failed probation, offered troubling observations. Racial epithets were supposedly in common use. Training officers spoke of the difference between "street (epithet)" and "upstanding black citizens." And so forth.

Even so, the Feds apparently didn't find enough to open a "pattern or practice" investigation. And three years later, in September 1998, the judge overseeing DOJ's hiring practices lawsuit [fully absolved Torrance of wrongdoing](#). Not only that, but he ordered the Feds to fork over \$1,714,727.50 to cover the city's litigation expenses. His actions [were affirmed on appeal](#).

On the other hand, the youths' lawsuit against the cops yielded a \$245,000 judgment in favor of the plaintiffs. [It, too, was upheld on appeal](#).

According to the *Washington Post*'s "[Fatal Force database](#)," five persons have been shot and killed by Torrance police officers since January 1, 2015. Except for the most recent episode, which appears to remain under investigation, each is linked to the [OIS investigative report](#) prepared by the L.A. County D.A.:

- October 31, 2016: [Michelle Lee Shirley](#) (Black, 39, resident of Los Angeles). Ms. Shirley, a law school graduate, [suffered from severe mental problems](#). Police opened fire after a prolonged encounter in which Shirley purposely crashed into other vehicles, including police cars, then allegedly tried to run down officers who intervened. The D.A. concluded there was insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that officers used unreasonable force.
- October 14, 2017: [Michael David Lopez](#) (Hispanic, 44, resident of San Gabriel Valley). Mr. Lopez had reportedly served two prison terms: one for assault with a deadly weapon, and another for "[felony reckless evading](#)." Torrance police began to pursue Mr. Lopez, who was thought to be drunk, after he evaded officers in an

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adjoining city. Mr. Lopez sped through multiple intersections and against traffic signals but was ultimately stopped with “PIT” maneuvers. As officers approached on foot, he reached down as though going for a weapon, then revved his pickup. Two officers opened fire as the vehicle lurched towards them. According to the D.A. they acted in lawful self-defense. Three other officers also fired; the D.A. concluded they also acted legally, in defense of their colleagues.

- June 1, 2018: [Juan Carlos Perez-Victor](#) (Hispanic, 38, residence unknown). Police were called to a commercial area where Mr. Perez-Victor was reportedly [acting bizarrely and flaunting a knife](#). He had supposedly run up to a car and placed the knife to the driver’s window. When officers arrived Mr. Perez-Victor was uncooperative and aggressive, and they responded with pepper spray and impact munitions. Neither stopped him, and he soon charged at them with a knife. They responded with gunfire. Meth and a second knife were found in his pockets. The D.A. concluded that the officers acted lawfully, in self-defense and in defense of their colleagues. (Mr. Perez-Victor’s entry lacks his name and incorrectly identifies him as White in the *Washington Post* database.)
- December 9, 2018: [Christopher Deandre Mitchell](#) (Black, 23, resident of Los Angeles). [Mr. Mitchell was approached by two officers](#) as he sat at the wheel of a parked car that a citizen had just reported stolen. Mr. Mitchell, who wore gang-like tattoos on his face, had what seemed to be a firearm on his lap. During the encounter he allegedly reached for it and persisted even when told to stop. Both officers fired their guns. It turned out that Mr. Mitchell had an air rifle whose stock had been cut into a hand grip. The D.A. concluded that the officers “acted lawfully in self-defense.”
- March 8, 2020: **Desiree Nicole Garza** (Hispanic, 28, resident of Torrance). In this incident, which apparently remains under D.A. review, [police were summoned by “multiple” neighbors](#) who reported “a person was breaking items inside a home and refusing to let go of a knife.” Exactly what happened when they arrived is unknown.

Mr. Mitchell’s killing caught fire with the Black community. Termed “[The South Bay’s Biggest Story of the Decade](#)” by Black Lives Matter, the tragic episode sparked demonstrations and [prompted demands](#) that the officers who shot him be fired and prosecuted. During his recent election campaign, L.A.’s new D.A., George Gascon, [pledged to reopen his office’s inquiry](#). In June 2021 he formed [a special team](#) to “re-examine” this incident and other past uses of force. Its progress is unknown.

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Dug in or not, Torrance's lid soon blew, big-time. On January 27, 2020 the owner of a vehicle that had been impounded by the city's cops [discovered, to his horror](#), that "a happy face had been spray painted on the front passenger seat and a swastika symbol on the rear seat." To the department's credit, an internal investigation was promptly launched. Within a few months, two officers, including one who had shot Mr. Lopez, were no longer on the force. Both have been referred for prosecution.

After [reporting on the vandalized car](#), the *Los Angeles Times* came in for a closer look. What it uncovered (we assume, with help from a friendly insider) was appalling. It seems that during the investigation of Mr. Lopez's death, police detectives and D.A. investigators came across [years of online chatter](#) among thirteen Torrance officers and a cop from nearby Long Beach. It featured numerous messages and images that "championed violence against Black people and members of the LGBTQ community, joked about beating up suspects and mocked the idea of internal affairs investigations into racial profiling."

That finally proved too much. Fifteen Torrance officers whom the *Times* connected to "at least seven serious or fatal uses of force against Black or Latino men since 2013" have been placed on leave. In addition, "at least 85" criminal cases in which they participated have been dismissed, and literally [hundreds of prosecutions are in peril](#).

After all, would *you* trust the truthfulness and accuracy of these officers' reports?

On December 8, 2021, California Attorney General Rob Bonta announced that his office has [opened a formal investigation](#) of Torrance P.D.:

California Attorney General Rob Bonta today announced launching an independent review of the Torrance Police Department (TPD) as part of an effort to identify and correct potential systemic failures in the department's policies and practices. The review comes amidst deeply concerning allegations of excessive force, racist text messages, and other discriminatory misconduct, and follows a request for assistance by the Torrance Chief of Police. More broadly, the review will aim to promote public safety and rebuild trust between TPD and the community it serves.

City police chief Jay Hart is supposedly onboard. So a full reckoning seems on the horizon.

One and one-half decades ago, when our oinker came to be, cops weren't running around wearing body cameras. Text messaging and such was a distant dream. So just when Torrance PD's culture began to rot we'll never know. In any event, simply blaming

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cops feels like a sell-out. Torrance has more than two-hundred officers in uniform. Should all be labeled “racists”?

As we’ve emphasized over the years, police personalities differ. When it comes to explaining officer behavior, such differences really, *really* matter. Let’s self-plagiarize from a couple of prior posts:

Officer temperament is crucial. Cops who are easily rattled, risk-intolerant, impulsive or aggressive are more likely to resort to force or apply it inappropriately. (“[Three Inexplicable Shootings](#)”)

When it comes to shaping outcomes, officer personalities and skill sets, the availability of human and material resources, and the quantity and quality of information are clearly important. And that’s not all. We’ve often mentioned “confirmation bias,” the all-too-human tendency to interpret things in a way that’s consistent with one’s pre-existing understandings and beliefs. That can affect what both cops and citizens do. (“[Want Happy Endings? Don’t Chase](#)”)



On December 18, long-serving *L.A. Times* columnist Steve Lopez [likened Torrance’s police scandal](#) to L.A.’s history of racial discrimination. His piece drew a letter from Torrance High School District’s first-ever Black principal. Mr. Sidney Morrison wrote that he received “outstanding support” from the police over the years. And both times that he was pulled over, he “quickly mentioned my relationship to the school district” and was treated cordially. But he pointed out that “those perceived as outsiders were treated differently.”

Who might these “outsiders” be? Torrance sits next to [LAPD’s Harbor Division](#), which serves about 171,000 residents in the communities of Harbor Gateway, Wilmington, Harbor City, San Pedro and Terminal Island. Between January 1, 2020 and December 18, 2020 – not quite a full year – this area logged [1,149 violent crimes](#). That produced a violent crime rate of 6.7/1,000, *more than three times* Torrance’s full-year rate of 1.9. Just Northeast of Torrance lies LAPD’s South Bureau. As every cop in Southern California knows, it’s been besieged by

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violence for decades (for a detailed account see “[Location, Location, Location](#).”) Consider, for example, the violence-prone [77th. Street Division](#). Serving a population of about 175,000, it [logged 3,369 violent crimes](#) between January 1 and December 18, 2020. That yields an astronomical per/1,000 rate of 19.3, *more than ten times* Torrance’s.

Switch to murder. For that we turn to the *L.A. Times*’ “[The Homicide Report](#),” which tracks deaths reported by the Los Angeles County coroner. During the twelve months preceding this essay – more or less the year 2021 – [Torrance suffered two murders](#) – one by gunshot, the other by stabbing. In contrast, the largest community served by Harbor Division, [San Pedro \(pop. 78,900\)](#), reported [four homicides](#), each from gunfire. During the same period Watts (pop. 175,000) [lost twenty-three of its citizens to murder](#); twenty-one from gunfire and two by a knife.

Below is a chart with this data. Violence is per/1,000 pop., and homicide is per/100,000 pop. Demographics are from the [Statistical Atlas of the U.S.](#) (its numbers for Torrance vary slightly from the Census.)

	Pop	Pct White	Pct Black	Pct <u>Hisp.</u>	Pct Asian	Median income	Viol rate	Hom rate
Torrance	147,307	40.3	2.6	17	34.3	80.9	1.9	1.4
San Pedro	78,900	35.8	6.8	47	5.9	64.5	6.7	5.1
Watts	175,000	0.6	24.0	73.6	0.7	29.6	19.3	13.1

Let’s return to the ex-principal’s observation that “outsiders” were more likely to catch heat from the cops. Torrance’s officers work in a tranquil city whose residents are primarily White or of Asian descent. They know there are less peaceful communities nearby. They’re fully aware that these places, which are populated by substantially larger proportions of Blacks and Hispanics, are far less prosperous if not outright poor. Torrance’s good cops – and we’re convinced they’re in the vast majority – understand that, as our “[Neighborhoods](#)” essays repeatedly emphasize, it’s not race but economic conditions that drive crime. So when danger lurks they set aside any biases or preconceptions they might have formed and strive to avoid acting on impulse. That’s what the craft of policing is all about.

Alas, thanks to text messaging and such, we’ve learned that some Torrance cops can’t possibly meet that standard. What’s most concerning is that their hideous notions could easily affect the complex decision-making calculus that good policing requires, distorting the response to everyday incidents and placing both cops and citizens at needless risk.

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In “[Third, Fourth and Fifth Chances](#)” we discussed the consequences of ignoring officer misconduct. Here they are in money terms:

- Chicago: About \$253 million since 2015
- Dallas: \$3.7 million since 2015
- Detroit: \$28.5 million since 2015
- District of Columbia: More than \$40 million since 2016
- Los Angeles County: More than \$238 million since 2015
- New York City: More than \$1.1 billion since 2015
- Minneapolis: Incalculable

But it's not *all* bad news. Torrance now has the opportunity – yes, *opportunity* – to fix its cop shop before...well, scan the list. Second chances don't come around real often. They ought not be missed.

Posted 3/7/23

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

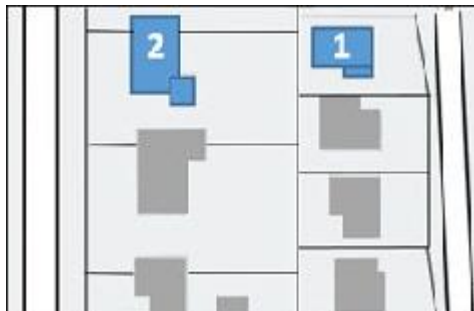
Wary cops, uncompliant citizens and troubled communities



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. What's undisputed is that during the mid-morning hours of Tuesday, February 21, Hemet, Calif. police officers went to a single-family residence "in the 800 block of South Harvard Street" to investigate a theft. While an officer was in this home's rear yard (we'll call it house #1) he unexpectedly came across an adult male in the rear yard of an "adjacent" residence (we'll call that house #2). He was armed with a handgun. The cop promptly shot the man dead.

That man's name was Christian Drye. He was 30 years of age and lived in house #2 with his wife, Shameka, and their five children.

Hemet PD's [brief online post](#) and a flurry of accounts in the media mostly agree on the basics. But the latter offer some troubling details furnished by the victim's wife. [According to NBCLA](#), Shameka Drye said that Hemet officers came to their home (house #2) because "someone involved in a theft sneak" was supposedly in their backyard. But her husband refused to grant them permission to enter "without a search warrant." Instead, he said that he had a legal, registered gun and would go check himself. Officers supposedly let him while giving "zero warning".



This "warning," we assume, would have been that officers at house #1 might be troubled by a non-cop's armed presence. And there was another complication. What's missing from the accounts we've read is that the homes aren't side-by-side. House #1 is on Harvard Street. But the victim's

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residence, house #2, is on a parallel street. A see-through fence separates the rear yards. That placed the two sets of cops far apart, creating a disconnect that could greatly complicate things should stuff happen.

Like a cop at house #1 noticing the sudden appearance of an armed man at the rear of house #2.

Considering the outcome, we “assume” that the officers at house #2 didn’t alert their colleagues at house #1 about Mr. Drye, or not quickly enough to avoid a tragic misunderstanding. His spouse has filed a lawsuit and we’re certain that this issue will be fleshed out in time. In any event, Mr. Drye’s behavior greatly complicated an already-fraught landscape. His armed appearance likely startled the officer in the other yard. He probably felt threatened by the man’s proximity, and perhaps by the manner in which he carried his gun.

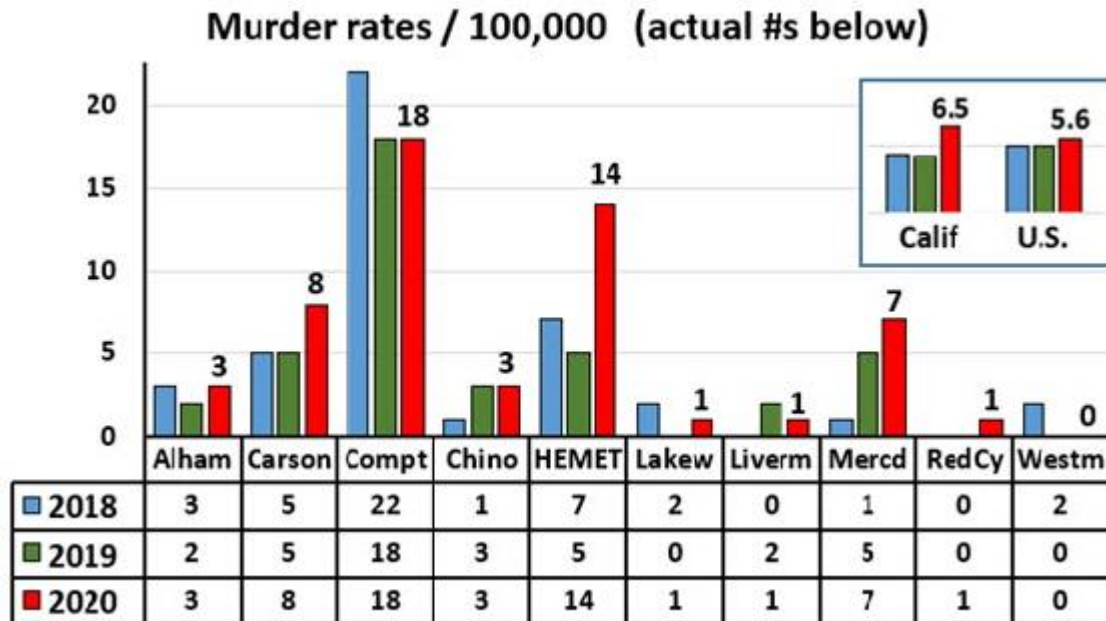
It wouldn’t be the first time that a cop has fired reflexively. In “[Three \(In?\)explicable Shootings](#)” we discussed the July 2017 killing of Justine Ruszczyk, a 9-1-1 caller who was shot dead by a Minneapolis cop who was startled when she slapped the trunk of his police car while unexpectedly walking up. That officer ([he wound up serving three years](#) for manslaughter) was reportedly hired despite concerns by psychiatrists. As in other examples we’ve mentioned, he may have been an unsuitable candidate from the start. Considering the reluctance of many citizens to voluntarily comply, being a cop calls for an abundance of risk tolerance. Impulsivity and aggressiveness can truly be shortcuts to disaster.

We know nothing about the officer who shot Mr. Drye. What’s more, it’s never only about individuals. Environment also matters. [A recent CNN piece](#) serves as a powerful reminder that Minneapolis – the city whose officers’ lousy behavior gave rise to the police defund movement – has long grappled with crime and violence. (Its well-known sobriquet is “Murderapolis”). Within its unforgiving atmosphere, senior officers, including [Derek Chauvin](#), were assigned to guide the newbies. As the city eventually discovered, the unholy combination of poor mentorship and “[highly charged, violence-laden environments](#)” can truly sabotage the craft of policing.

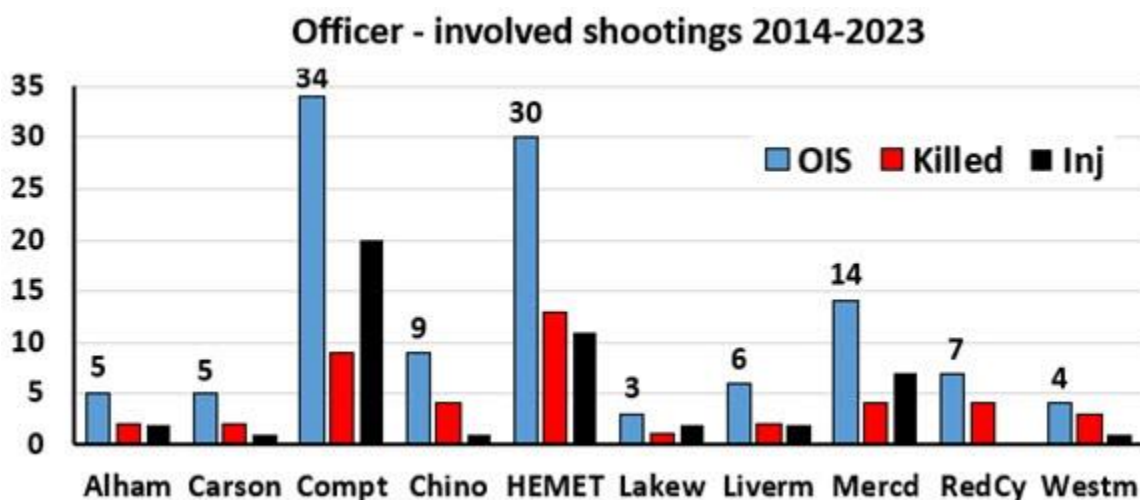
So what’s *Hemet* all about? Located in a rural area of Riverside County, about eighty miles southeast of Los Angeles, the [working-class city of about ninety-thousand](#) is 22.7 percent White, 23.3 percent Black and 25.6 percent Hispanic. Alas, its residents endure an unusually high poverty level of 23.7 percent, about twice Riverside County’s 11.6 percent and California’s 12.3 percent overall. As one might expect, Hemet’s lousy economics augur a substantial burden of crime and violence. Indeed, [USA.com’s crime index](#) ranks it 412 worst, crime-wise, out of 466 California cities.

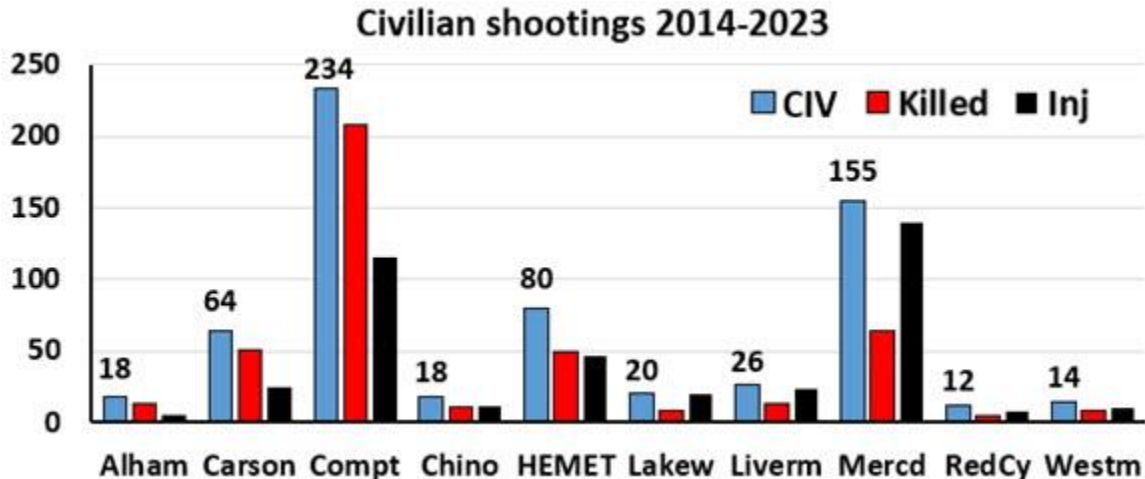
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[According to the UCR](#), Hemet's violent crime rate, and particularly its homicide rate, have long been elevated. This graph uses 2018-2020 UCR data to compare Hemet murder-wise with California, U.S. and a random sample of nine California cities with populations from 80,000-100,000.



In line with its substantial murder rate, Hemet suffers from lots of gunplay, lethal and otherwise. These two graphs reflect a decade's worth of officer-involved and civilian shooting incident data from the [Gun Violence Archive](#):





And the Archive can add [another civilian-on-civilian murder](#) to Hemet's toll. It happened on February 22, one day after police killed Mr. Frye. What's more, it's not only the city's innocents who fall victim to their deranged fellow residents. On January 21, the eve of Lunar New Year, [Hemet septuagenerian Huu Can Tran burst into a dance studio](#) in Monterey Park, about an hour's drive away. Armed with an assault-style pistol, he opened fire on a crowd with which he had once mingled, killing ten and wounding ten others. Tran later committed suicide.

It's not that *Police Issues* has an issue with the city. In a decade-and-a-half, none of our posts as much as mentioned Hemet. So when we heard about Mr. Drye's tragic killing, we promptly turned to (what else?) Google. And what it revealed was quite disconcerting. Consider, for example, this [October 7, 2019 headline](#) from a well-known area media outlet, the *Palm Springs Desert Sun*:

**Hemet, named one of "America's Most Miserable" cities,
has struggled since the Great Recession**

Who named it that? None other than *Business Insider*. Check out its [September 28, 2019 feature story](#), which ranks Hemet as no. 44 in its list of "The 50 most miserable cities in America, based on Census data."

Yikes. First responders are well aware of a city's foibles. Hemet's police officers know full well that their city's rough edges present an elevated personal risk for both citizens and cops. Note that sobering frequency of officer-involved shootings, which falls just short of notoriously violent Compton (of which we *have* often written.) Could such things affect workplace attitudes? How could they not? Still, whatever their environs, the craft of policing demands that officers accept considerable personal risk. Here's a bit of self-plagiarism from one of our very first posts, "[When Cops Kill \(Part II\)](#)":

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Considering the situations that officers regularly face, where things are often not what they seem, they must be able to tolerate considerable risk. In fact most do; if they didn't our streets would be lined with dead citizens. An overwhelming majority serve out their careers without killing anyone. That's not an indication, as some have implied, that they're slackers. On the contrary, it's evidence that they're sufficiently skilled, levelheaded and risk-tolerant to do their jobs without needlessly taking life.

Again, we know nothing about the officer who fired that shot. We're troubled, though, by the account given by Mr. Drye's wife. Did the officers at house #2 let her husband grab a gun and head to the back door without raising a stink? After all, they *had* to know what could happen. Or did Mr. Drye ignore their admonitions and behave as impulsively as the cop who gunned him down?

Over the years, our [Use of Force](#) and [Neighborhoods](#) posts have cautioned about the lethal combination of uncompliant citizens and edgy cops that besets down-on-their-luck places like Hemet. Alas, in our badly polarized society, changing citizen hearts and minds is probably a non-starter. But cops might listen to reason. Addressing (and, hopefully, *preventing*) catastrophes such as what happened in Hemet requires honest, deep discussions about the police workplace and the personalities of both citizens and cops. And these examinations must become a topic not just for training, but for roll-calls and everyday chatter.

Want a place to start? Here's an essay. No charge!

Posted 9/7/20

WHITE ON BLACK

Should Black citizens fear White cops?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Jackson, Mississippi's capital city, is mostly Black. Ditto its cops. So if citizens are better off dealing with cops of their own race, a frail, elderly Black resident should have survived a minor encounter with three Black cops. But as we reported in "[Black on Black](#)" Mr. George Robinson didn't.

This time we'll explore the citizen/cop combination that's provoked protests across the U.S. For examples we'll offer two: the August 23rd wounding of Mr. Jacob Blake, a Black resident of Kenosha, Wisconsin, by a White police officer, and the killing of Mr. Dijon Kizzee, a Black resident of a Los Angeles suburb, shot dead by White Sheriff's deputies on August 31st.

Here's an extract from a [tweet](#) posted by Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers on August 23rd, about three hours after a White Kenosha cop shot and crippled Mr. Jacob Blake:

Tonight, Jacob Blake was shot in the back multiple times, in broad daylight, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Kathy and I join his family, friends, and neighbors in hoping earnestly that he will not succumb to his injuries....While we do not have all of the details yet, what we know for certain is that he is not the first Black man or person to have been shot or injured or mercilessly killed at the hands of individuals in law enforcement in our state or our country.

However compelled Governor Evers may have felt to denounce the police, his swift opinionating virtually guaranteed that something important would be left out. And it was. When their handiwork went tragically astray, three White cops were trying to arrest the 29-year old Black man on [a recently-issued warrant](#) for felony sexual assault. A Black woman who was apparently Mr. Blake's former domestic partner accused him of [breaking into her home](#) while she slept, sexually assaulting her, then leaving with her car and a credit card.



Mr. Blake remained free. On August 23rd the victim called police [to complain that he was back](#). According to the Wisconsin Department of Justice, which is investigating the use of force, "Police Department officers were dispatched to a residence in the 2800 block of 40th Street after a female caller reported that her boyfriend was present and was not supposed to be on the premises." [An account posted by the police union](#) adds that

Mr. Blake "was attempting to steal the caller's keys/vehicle." Here's our best assessment of what then took place:

- Officers arrived. [Radio messages](#) indicate that they knew of the warrant. Three officers tried to intercept Mr. Blake as he walked to his car. [According to the police union](#) Mr. Blake supposedly "forcefully fought with the officers, including putting one of the officers in a headlock."
- Mr. Blake apparently freed himself and kept walking. [Two officers fired their Tasers](#) but without apparent effect. A bystander who didn't see what, if anything, Mr. Blake carried said that [officers commanded Mr. Blake](#) to "drop the knife!"
- Two bystander videos depict the last part of the encounter. (Click [here](#) and [here](#).) Pistols drawn, officers followed Mr. Blake around his vehicle to the driver's side. As he approaches the door an officer grabbed him by the shirt (see above image) and when the still-noncompliant man stepped in the cop fired seven times into his back. Police claim they recovered a knife from the vehicle's floorboard, and state investigators reported that Mr. Blake admitted it was his.

Mr. Blake's lower body was paralyzed and he remains hospitalized. As for the sexual assault, he pled not guilty via video, posted a \$10,000 bond and waived a preliminary hearing. [Trial could take place](#) as early as November.

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Demonstrations and violence followed. As did visits by President Trump and his challenger, Mr. Joe Biden. Their views were predestined to clash. Focusing on the violence, the President praised law enforcement and the National Guard and [denied that racism had infected policing](#). As for Mr. Blake's shooting, his opinions seemed decidedly mixed:

Shooting the guy in the back many times. I mean, couldn't you have done something different? Couldn't you have wrestled him? You know, I mean, in the meantime, he might've been going for a weapon. And, you know, there's a whole big thing there.

In a controversial follow-on Mr. Trump likened what the officer did to a golfer who "chokes" while attempting a "three-foot putt."

Mr. Biden took a different tack. Focusing on the issue of race, he met with Mr. Blake's family, and in an hour-plus speech at a local church the candidate [bemoaned the plight of Black Americans](#) who must deal with White police: "I can't understand what it's like to walk out the door or send my son out the door or my daughter and worry about just because they're Black they may not come back."

During the afternoon hours of August 31st L.A. County sheriff's deputies were patrolling Westmont, an unincorporated neighborhood in the hard-stricken South Los Angeles area [when they came across a bicyclist](#) reportedly committing an unspecified moving violation. And when they flagged him down he dropped the bike and took off on foot, jacket in hand.

A blurry security camera video depicts deputies chasing a large, burly man as he runs down a sidewalk. There's a protracted, violent tangle during which a deputy said he was punched in the face. Dijon Kizzee, 29, managed to free himself and resumed fleeing. Deputies said that's when he dropped the bundle he was carrying. A gun supposedly fell out, and Mr. Kizzee moved as if to grab it (but didn't). Mr. Kizzee then resumed fleeing (see image) but managed only one long stride before two deputies – [a supervisor and a trainee](#) – opened fire. Mortally wounded, Mr. Kizzee fell to the ground.



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Deputies discharged as many as fifteen shots. The handgun Mr. Kizzee allegedly possessed was recovered.

Gunfire by Kenosha police paralyzed Jacob Blake, likely permanently. Gunfire by L.A. Sheriff's deputies killed Dijon Kizzee. Why did officers turn to lethal force?

We'll start with Kenosha. With a population of about 100,000, [in 2018 its violent crime rate](#) of 338.2 came in slightly better than the national figure (368.9). That year its murder count was...four. In 2019 killings zoomed all the way to...five. So unlike, say, [Jackson](#) or, as we go on, South L.A.'s Westmont neighborhood, its cops should have little reason to feel they're at war.

According to Kenosha police chief Daniel Miskinis [it was a combination of things](#). An outstanding arrest warrant may have produced a "heightened awareness" that, together with Mr. Blake's resistance and possession of a knife, "changed the dynamics" of the encounter. Meaning, it made officers more likely to act defensively or, put another way, aggressively.

To be sure, individuals count. That warrant was for a crime of violence. And this wasn't the first time that Mr. Blake had violently misbehaved. [According to a court file](#) reviewed by *USA Today*, in 2015 Racine (Wis.) police arrested Mr. Blake after he pulled a gun in a bar and became "combative" when confronted by officers. A firearm was recovered and he was charged with five counts. However, it seems that everything was ultimately dismissed. (For a detailed account of the incident click [here](#).)

What about the cop? Other than being White, [officer Rusten Sheskey](#) was thirty-one years old, had seven years on the job, and lacked any substantial disciplinary record. He also seemed very community-oriented. Indeed, [a year-old newspaper profile](#) depicted him in a very favorable light. Here's an outtake from his comments during the interview:

What I like most is that you're dealing with people on perhaps the worst day of their lives and you can try and help them as much as you can and make that day a little bit better. And that, for the most part, people trust us to do that for them. And it's a huge responsibility, and I really like trying to help the people. We may not be able to make a situation right, or better, but we can maybe make it a little easier for them to handle during that time.

Square that with shooting someone in the back. Your writer can't. Neither, apparently, can Mr. Joe Biden, [who quickly called](#) for the officer and his colleagues to be prosecuted.

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[L.A.'s Westmont area](#) (2010 pop. 31,853), where the encounter between Sheriff's Deputies and Mr. Kizzee took place, is no Kenosha. Only three months earlier [deputies shot and killed](#) an 18-year old murder suspect who reportedly fired on them as he tried to get away. Westmont's most recent [six-month violent crime rate](#) of 413/100,000 (its projected full-year rate would be 826, more than twice Kenosha's) places it as the 27th most violent of Los Angeles' 272 neighborhoods. As one would expect, Westmont is also poor. A full *thirty percent* of its residents live in poverty, [nearly three times the U.S. figure](#) of 11.8 percent.

Might the implicit threat that Westmont presents affect officer decisions? Cops must frequently weigh the consequences to themselves and others of acting swiftly against delaying or trying to "de-escalate." Of course, the consequences of laying a wrong bet can be profound. [Let's self-plagiarize](#):

In the uncertain and often hostile environment of the streets, officers can find it impossible to quickly choreograph and implement a peaceful response. Bottom line: "slowing down" requires that cops occasionally accept considerable risk. Should their judgment be off, they can be easily hurt or killed. That's not ideology: it's just plain fact.

Officer temperaments vary. Crucial characteristics such as impulsivity and risk tolerance are all over the map. Citizen personalities also run the gamut. Factor in the violence, gun-slinging and lack of voluntary compliance that besets hard-hit areas, and the answer to our question seems clear: how could Westmont's nasty aura *not* count?

We know nothing about the deputies involved other than their ranks. However, plenty is known about Mr. Kizzee. [According to family members](#) he was an "unemployed plumber" who had served time in prison but "was trying to find his way." We obtained his criminal record through the [Los Angeles Superior Court website](#). Here's a condensed version:

CASE NO.	DATE	CHARGES	DISPO	SENTENCE
ATPMA079162-01	6/16/20	Bringing drugs into jail, battery on an officer	Pending	
XCNBA464078-01	1/3/18	Possession of firearm by prohibited person	Nolo (guilty)	28 mos. state prison
ATP8AN03322-01	3/23/18	Felony spousal abuse	Nolo (guilty)	180 days jail
SBAYA093627-01	1/16/16	Evading police; gun poss. by prohibited person	Nolo (guilty)	16 mos. state prison
XNOMA054124-01	9/21/11	Sale of meth, felony resisting	Nolo (guilty)	4 yrs. jail, 5 yrs. prob.

Posted 10/25/21, edited 11/25/21

“WOKE” UP, AMERICA!

Violence besets poor neighborhoods. So why should the well-off care?



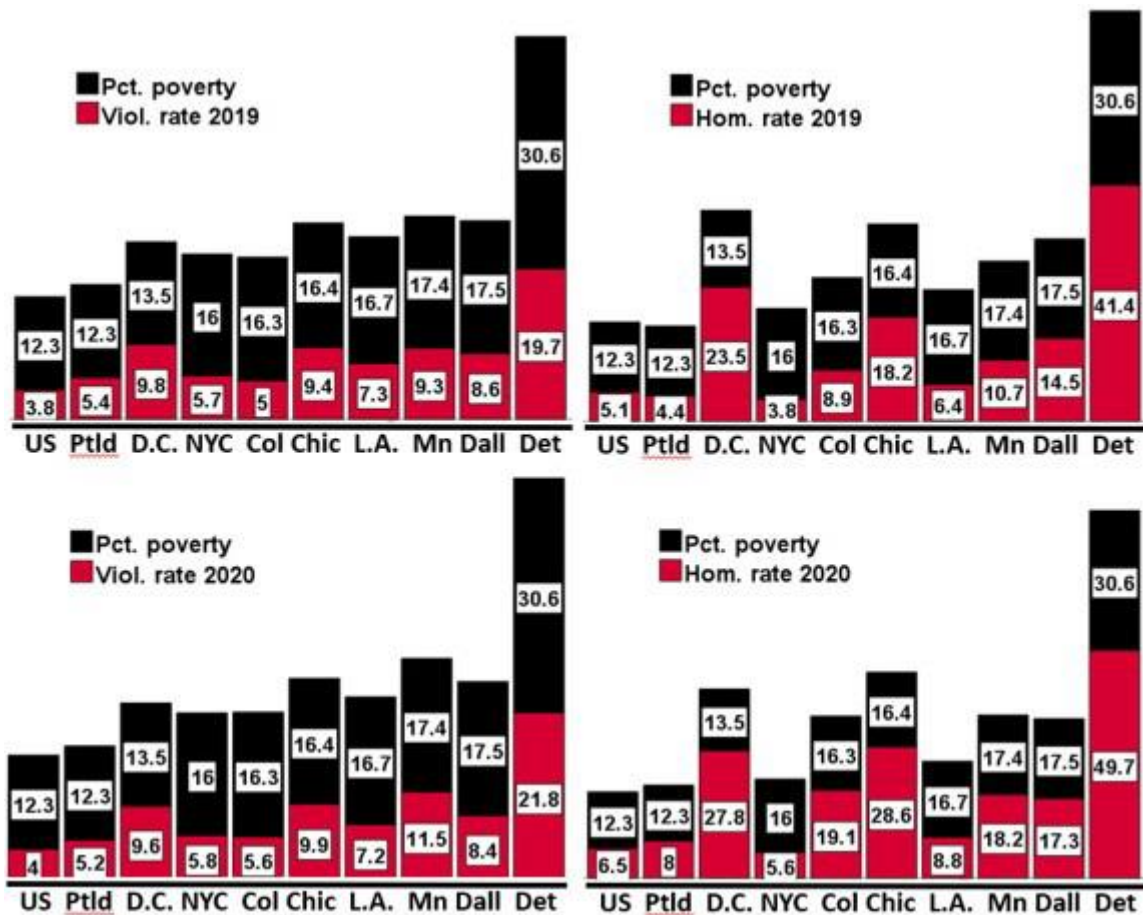
For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. “In 2020, the United States witnessed a nearly 30% increase in the murder rate – which is the largest increase in the 60 years that the FBI has been keeping records. And 77% of those homicides were committed with a firearm.” Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco’s [October 6th. address](#) to the Major Cities Chiefs Association actually began with the grim recap of a recent series of shootings of Federal law enforcement officers, including the killing of a DEA agent.

Violent crime did increase in 2020, and in many places quite dramatically. This table displays poverty, violent crime (murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) and homicide data for eight cities featured in recent Police Issues essays: [Chicago](#), [Columbus](#), [Dallas](#), [Detroit](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Minneapolis](#), [New York City](#), and [Portland](#). (In November we added a ninth, the District of Columbia.) They appear in order of percent of residents in poverty according to the [2019 ACS](#). Number of violent crimes and homicides in 2019 are from the [UCR](#), and for 2020 they’re from the [Crime Data Explorer](#) (violence and homicide rates are both calculated per 100,000 pop.)

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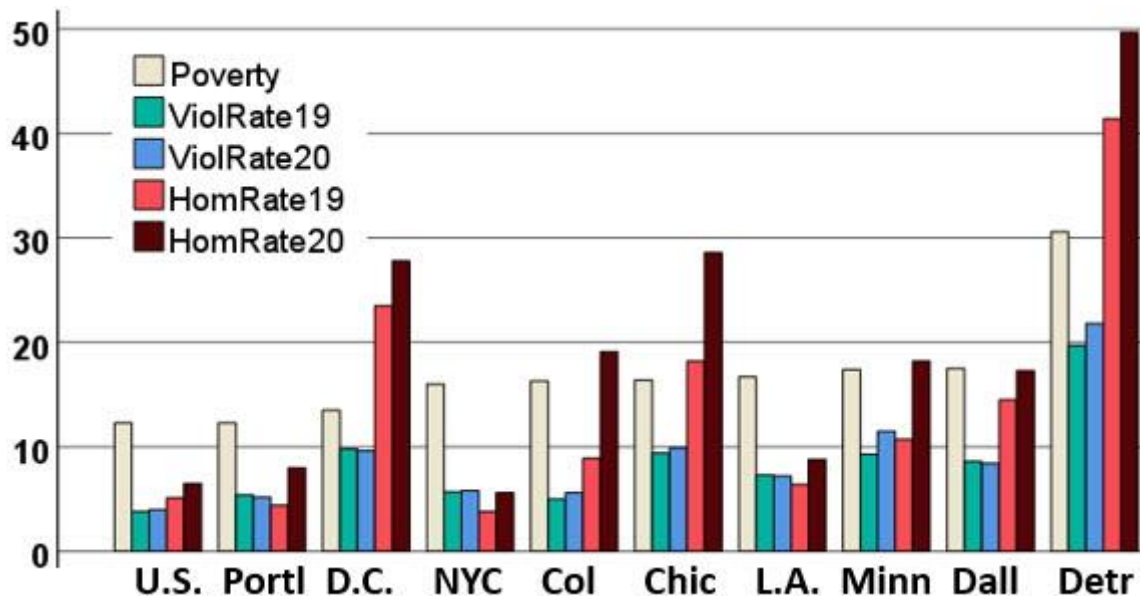
	Pov	Pop19	Pop20	Viol19	Viol20	VRT19	VRT20	Hom19	Hom20	HRT19	HRT20
U.S.	12.3					380.8	398.5			5.1	6.5
Portland	12.3	662114	662941	3606	3465	544.6	522.7	29	53	4.4	8.0
D.C.	13.5	705749	712816	6896	6828	977.1	957.9	166	198	23.5	27.8
NYC	16	8379043	8300377	47821	47959	570.7	577.8	319	468	3.8	5.6
Columbus	16.3	906120	911383	4561	5064	503.4	555.6	81	174	8.9	19.1
Chicago	16.4	2707064	2693598	25532	26583	943.2	986.9	492	771	18.2	28.6
L.A.	16.7	4015546	4000587	29400	28882	732.2	721.9	258	351	6.4	8.8
Minn.	17.4	431016	435116	3990	5025	925.7	1154.9	46	79	10.7	18.2
Dallas	17.5	1363295	1363028	11764	11514	862.9	844.7	198	236	14.5	17.3
Detroit	30.6	663502	659616	13040	14370	1965.3	2178.5	275	328	41.4	49.7

Here's the data in graphic form:



While the magnitude of the increases varied from place to place, poorer places generally got the raw end of the deal: they often began with higher rates of violence, and increases – particularly, in homicide – were usually more pronounced:

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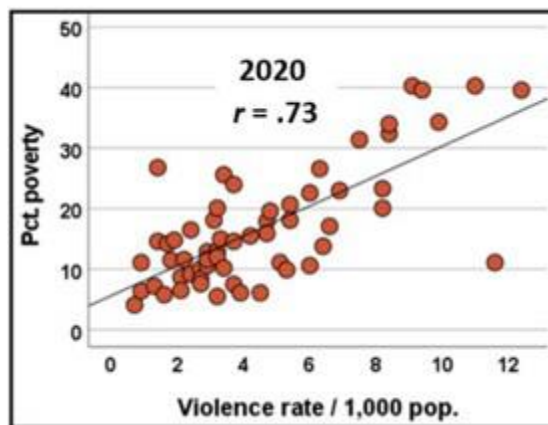
Elevated levels of violence persisted into 2021. For example:

- [Portland](#) reported 40 homicides, 761 robberies and 6,671 assaults between January 1 and September 30, 2020. During the same period this year there were 63 homicides (a 58 percent increase), 816 robberies and 7,100 assaults. Police attribute [the sharp increase in murder](#) to budget cuts, a loss of officers and the disbandment of a specialized unit due to concerns about discriminatory policing.
- [New York City](#) recorded 374 homicides, 9,980 robberies and 16,173 felony assaults from January 1 through October 10, 2020. During that period this year there were (again) 374 homicides, 9,976 robberies and 17,412 felony assaults.
- [Chicago](#) reported 623 murders and 6,091 robberies from January 1 through October 13, 2020. During that period this year there were 639 murders and 5,760 robberies.
- [Los Angeles](#) recorded 265 homicides, 6,233 robberies and 14,248 aggravated assaults from January 1 through October 9, 2020. This year's corresponding toll came in at 307 homicides, 6,266 robberies and 15,548 aggravated assaults.
- [D.C. suffered 201 homicides in 2021 as of Nov. 23](#). That's 11% more than during the same period in 2020, when there were 179. Even when compared with full years, it's the greatest number of murders since 2003, when there were 248. It's *more than twice as many* as in 2012, when there were 88 murders, and 42 percent more than in 2017, when the homicide count was 116.

But our concern isn't about differences *between* cities. Instead, it's about disparities *within*. 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. Say that a Martian criminologist lands on our block and asks whether violence and economic conditions are linked on the Earth, as they are on its planet. How would we respond?

Well, we could refer to our lead table and cite U.S. poverty and homicide rates. Or, say, New York City's. Job done! But either response would mislead. As essays in our [Neighborhoods special section](#) have long argued, the risk of victimization depends on *where*. In the end, *neighborhoods* – the places where we live – are what *really* “counts” (see, most recently, [“The Usual Victims”](#)).

Consider the Big Apple. New York City's [Furman Center](#) collects poverty and “serious” crime data for each of the city's “community districts” (i.e., neighborhoods). Serious violent crimes include “most types of assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, murder (including non-negligent manslaughter), rape,



District	Poverty	Viol
Tottenville	4.1%	0.7
Queens Village	5.5%	3.2
Upper East Side	5.8%	1.6
Financial District	6.1%	3.9
Greenwich / SoHo	6.1%	4.5
Brownsville	34.3%	9.9
Hunts Pt./Longwood	39.6%	9.4
Mott Haven/Melrose	39.6%	12.4
Belmont/East Tremont	40.3%	9.1
Morrisania/Crotona	40.3%	11

and robbery.” Both vary widely among the city's 59 districts. Poverty ranges between 4.1 and 40.3 percent, while in 2020 “serious violent crime” went between 0.7 and 12.4 per thousand population. We used the Center's data to generate the scattergram (each “dot” represents a community district) and its accompanying table. They indicate that within New York City, violence and poverty increase and decrease pretty much in sync. This relationship is confirmed by a sizeable “r” statistic (its value can range from zero, meaning no relationship between variables, to one, a lock-step association.)

[“Fix Those Neighborhoods!”](#) described large disparities in poverty and violence within New York City and Los Angeles in 2020. We contrasted the per/100,000 murder

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rates of the Big Apple's wealthy Upper East Side (pop. 220,000, poverty 7.2%, murder rate 0.5) and its struggling Brownsville district (pop. 86,000, poverty 29.4%, murder rate 29.1). We also compared affluent West Los Angeles (pop. 228,000, poverty 11.3%, murder rate 1.8) with the impoverished 77th. Street area (pop. 175,000, poverty 30.7%, murder rate 27.4).

Those inequalities persisted into this year. Between January 1 and October 17, 2021, NYPD's well-off 19th. precinct, which covers the Upper East Side, [posted two killings](#) (one more than last year), yielding a murder rate of 0.9/100,000. In contrast, the 73rd. precinct, which handles Brownsville, [logged fourteen homicides](#). While that's better than the twenty-two killings it recorded at that point in 2020, its murder rate, 16.3, was still eighteen times higher than its wealthy competitor's.

Not much changed in Los Angeles, either. LAPD's been screaming bloody (murder) about the city's 2021 increase in homicide, [which is greatly burdening](#) its beleaguered detectives. What the newspaper article *didn't* mention is that West L.A. doesn't need their help: as of October 16, [none of its 228,000 residents](#) have been murdered this year. *Not one*. Meanwhile the economically distraught 77th. Street area (pop. 175,000) posted *forty-four* killings, yielding a rate of 25.1.

Neighborhood	Pop	Pov	Person crimes	Rate
Arnold Creek	2,811	3.2	4	1.42
Alameda	5,622	6.9	8	1.42
Crestwood	1,488	7.3	1	0.67
Ashcreek	4,383	7.5	17	3.88
Hayhurst	5,978	8.6	9	1.51
Downtown	11,170	32.8	494	44.23
Centennial	7,386	29.7	318	43.05
Lloyd	2,124	25.3	152	71.56
Eliot	3,851	23.8	141	36.61
Creston-Kenilworth	8,242	20.7	64	7.77

[“Don't Divest – Invest!”](#) compared Portland's ten most prosperous neighborhoods with the ten most stricken by poverty. Using [Portland Police Bureau crime data](#) for 2021 (Jan. 1 through September 30), and neighborhood population and poverty figures from [Portland Monthly](#), we compared crimes against person rates between the five most prosperous neighborhoods and the five least. Check out that table on the left. As one would

expect, poverty and crime lined up most convincingly

We could go on, but the point's obvious. In our country's many poverty-stricken neighborhoods, things are harkening back to the violence-ridden years of the crack epidemic. So why hasn't America embarked on that [“Marshall Plan”](#) *Police Issues* keeps yakking about? As we've repeatedly implored, “a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities,

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language skills, job training, summer jobs, apprenticeships, health services and – yes – adequate housing could yield vast benefits.”

Last December John Jay’s [The Crime Report](#) actually published one of our rants. They even entitled it “[Memo to Joe Biden](#)”! Alas, your faithful blogger never heard from the White House. We recently deduced the reason. According to the very “woke” *The New York Times*, [unless President Biden’s “social safety net” bill is substantially shrunk](#) it will go nowhere. With that in mind, Senator Joe Manchin (D – W.Va.) offered an obvious fix: “Limit access to every program in the ambitious measure to only those Americans who need it most.” Makes sense, right? Not to Democratic Rep. Mikie Sherrill, who represents a prosperous area of New Jersey. Instead of limiting child care benefits to families that earn *no more than twice* a state’s median income, her recent amendment extended the proposed benefit to nearly everyone. Why? Because of an apparently widespread concern among “Blues” that unless the upper-crust gets its cut, even the “wokest” voters might defect to the “Reds”.

Hmm. Anyone still up for that “Marshall Plan”? Nah, we didn’t think so.

Posted 10/20/22

WORLDS APART...NOT!

*Violence-wise, poor neighborhoods in Oakland and Houston
aren't so different*



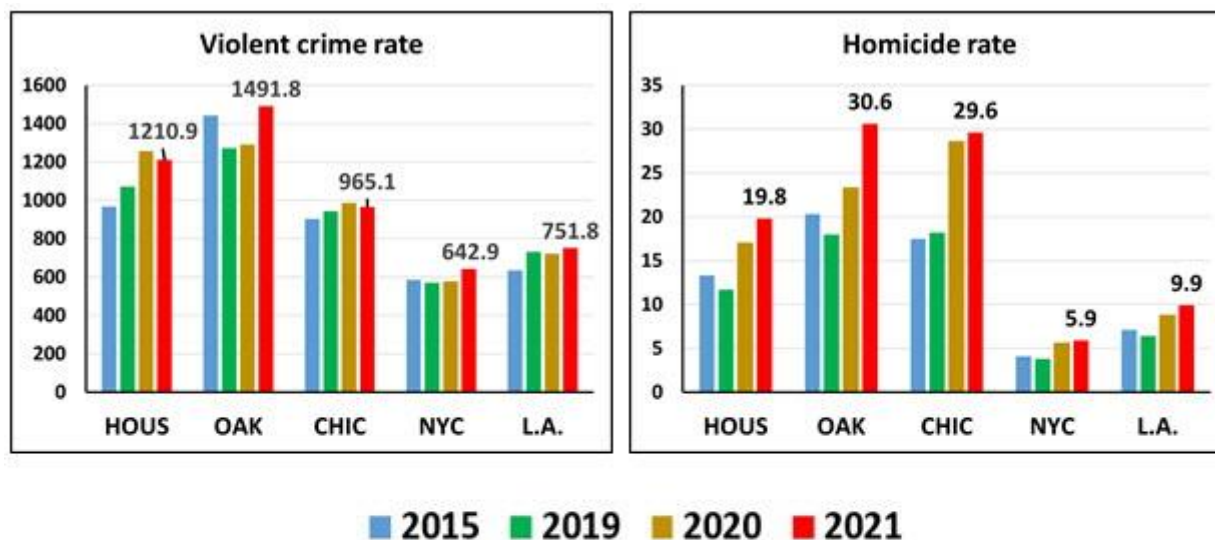
For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Oakland Police Chief LeRonne L. Armstrong's [September 27 news release](#) was seriously disquieting. "In the midst of the deadliest week this year with eight lives lost" he announced a major effort to deploy "all available resources" to fight the gun violence that threatened to consume his community. While the good Chief didn't mention it, [only a week had passed](#) since a shooting just outside City Hall claimed the fourth death by gunfire in less than a day. And what the Chief *couldn't* know was that on September 28 – one day after his comments – [two shooters would open fire inside a local high school complex](#), wounding six including a security guard, in what the beset city has called a gang-related attack.

We posted an update about the school shooting on the twenty-ninth. But what we couldn't predict was that on the same day the Department of Justice would issue [an elaborate news release](#) announcing a "surge of resources" to combat violence in Houston.

Houston?

In law enforcement circles, and likely elsewhere, Oakland's long carried a reputation for being a dangerous place. Not so much America's famed "Space City". Boasting nearly two and one-half million residents, the home of each U.S. person-on-the-moon mission ranks [fourth, population-wise](#), behind New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago. And other than for occasional slap-downs over the behavior of its cops (see, for example, "[Before Jet Blue](#)") it's mostly figured in our essays as the place where [George Floyd](#) earned his criminal stripes before relocating to Minneapolis.

Our bad. After reading about the AG’s intentions, we looked up Houston’s crime numbers. And while they’re not quite “up” to Oakland’s level, they’re also quite bad. Here’s a comparo that includes New York City, L.A. and Chicago as well:

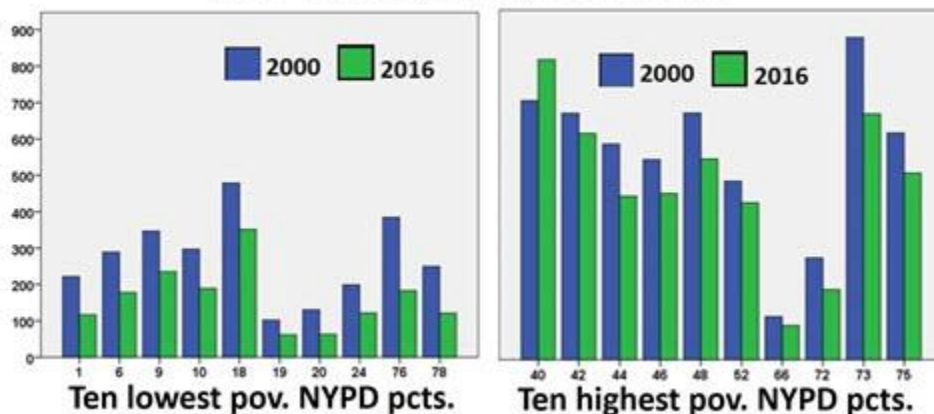


	2015		2019		2020		2021	
	Viol	Mur	Viol	Mur	Viol	Mur	Viol	Mur
HOUS	966.7	13.3	1072.2	11.7	1256.3	17.0	1210.9	19.8
OAK	1442.5	20.3	1271.8	18.0	1290.9	23.3	1491.8	30.6
CHIC	903.8	17.5	943.2	18.2	986.9	28.6	965.1	29.6
NYC	585.8	4.1	570.7	3.8	577.8	5.6	642.9	5.9
L.A.	634.8	7.1	732.2	6.4	721.9	8.8	751.8	9.9

(2015 and 2019 data is from the [UCR](#). 2020 data is from the [NIBRS](#). 2021 data for Houston is from the [NIBRS](#). 2021 data for the other cities is from their sites. Click [here](#) for LAPD, [here](#) for NYPD, [here](#) for Chicago, and [here](#) for Oakland).

Full stop. Municipal boundaries are artificial constructs. People live in *neighborhoods*. And as we’ve often reported, residents of economically better-off places endure less violence – often, far less – than their deprived cousins. Consider, say, New York City. Despite recent surges in violence, the crime rates that former Mayor Bloomberg [used to brag about](#) remain, comparatively speaking, a marvel. But even in the Big Apple, violence and affluence are undeniably linked. Here, for example, is the somewhat dated comparo in “[Be Careful What You Brag About \(Part II\)](#)”:

New York City felony assault rates



Our data forays indicate that neighborhood poverty continues to exert its unholy influence, in New York City and elsewhere:

- “[What’s up? Violence](#)” set out homicide, aggravated assault and robbery rates per 100,000 pop. For New York City’s wealthy Upper East Side (pop. 220,000) and its downtrodden Brownsville/Ocean Hill area (pop. 86,000).

NYPD	% Pov	Homicide		Agg Aslt		Robbery	
		2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
19th	7.2	0.5	0.9	51	69.1	107.7	79.1
73rd	29.4	29.1	26.7	674	744.2	290.7	267.4

- It’s not just New York City. Here we use data from “What’s Up?” to compare LAPD’s advantaged West L.A. area (pop. 228,000) with the city’s chronically poor 77th. Street district (pop. 175,000):

LAPD	% Pov	Homicide		Agg Aslt		Robbery	
		2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
WLA	11.3	1.8	0.0	96	96.9	64.5	69.7
77th St	30.7	32.0	35.4	1087	986.2	478.9	477.1

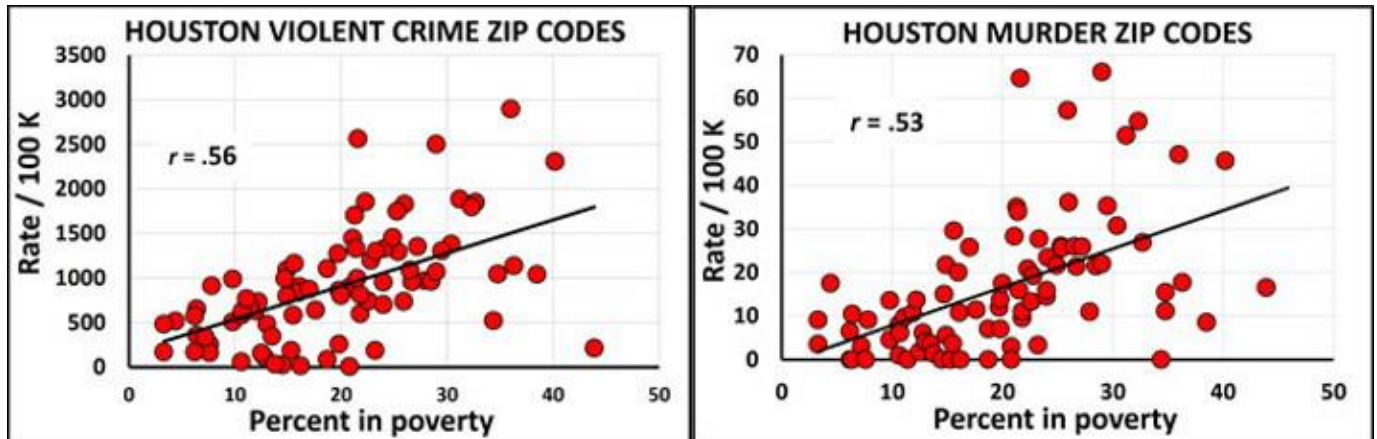
- Data from Chicago PD’s [2021 Annual Report](#) and the city’s [community poverty level report](#) was used to compare homicide, violent crime and poverty rates between CPD’s 20th. District (its primary constituent neighborhood is [Lincoln Park](#), pop. 70,492, pov. 12.3%) and its 7th. District, which serves the chronically troubled [Englewood area](#) (pop. 24,369, pov. 46.6%). These are rates, so they're directly comparable. Once again, poverty’s influence seems indisputable:

Chicago area	CPD Dist.	% Pov	Homicide		Viol. crime	
			2020	2021	2020	2021
Lincoln Pk	20	12.3	7.6	3.3	314.8	378.8
Englewood	7	46.6	126	97	3246.3	3001.2

Houston

So what about our new places of interest? Do neighborhood economic conditions exert a like influence on the personal safety of Houston’s inhabitants? There’s been a “tweak” in our approach. We’ve grown fond of the Census’ ability to specify income and poverty by ZIP. [Houston has ninety-six ZIP codes](#). Eliminating those that are clearly non-residential or include adjacent cities, we wound up with eighty-five. Turning to the [Census](#), we recorded each Zip’s percent of residents in poverty (i.e., “below 100 percent of the poverty level”).

[Houston PD’s crime data portal](#) provides a street address for each crime incident, and the ZIP codes of most. Filling in those that were missing, we coded full-year 2021 data for aggravated assaults, robberies and murders (not simply “homicides,” but unlawful, intentional killings.)



Do Houston’s neighborhoods experience a connection between economic conditions and violence? According to our scattergrams – each dot is a Zip – the answer seems “yes”. As Zip’s get poorer, murder and violent crime rates consistently increase. While the relationship isn’t perfect – some poor places had no murders – the correlations are substantial.

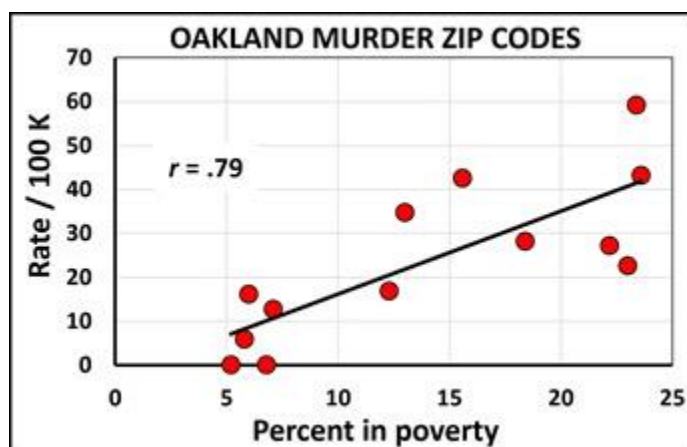
Searching for another way to visualize the relationship, we fell back on our earlier effort in “[Don’t Divest – Invest!](#)”, which contrasted Portland’s ten most “peaceful” neighborhoods with the ten most racked by crime and violence. This table, which sets

out Zip codes in order of poverty, compares Houston's five wealthiest Zip's with the five most disadvantaged:

Houston's five most prosperous ZIP's								
ZIP	Pop.	Pov.	Murd	Rate	Viol Cr	Rate	White	Black
77005	29022	3.3	1	3.4	49	168.8	78.9	2.4
77094	11022	3.3	1	9.1	53	480.9	57	4.8
77007	40112	4.4	7	17.5	208	518.5	74	5.6
77062	25568	6.2	0	0.0	43	168.2	68.8	9.2
77098	15487	6.2	1	6.5	89	574.7	73.3	3.1
Houston's five poorest								
ZIP	Pop.	Pov.	Murd	Rate	Viol Cr	Rate	White	Black
77026	21269	36	10	47.0	616	2896.2	27.7	50.5
77060	45376	36.3	8	17.6	516	1137.2	61.9	18
77093	46985	38.5	4	8.5	488	1038.6	74	11.1
77051	17547	40.2	8	45.6	405	2308.1	15	75
77050	6052	43.9	1	16.5	13	214.8	38.1	25.3

“Disadvantage” clearly carries some violent baggage. While the uncertainties of data (and the vagaries of human nature) create exceptions, the trend is nonetheless clear: more bucks, less violence. In addition to rates, which are comparable across jurisdictions, we also included actual murder and violent crime counts. Proportion of White and Black residents is from the Census. Its [2021 estimates](#) indicate that about thirty percent of Houston's residents are White and about twenty-two percent are Black. Note that the latter are substantially under-represented in the most prosperous Zip's. And that under-representation carries some potentially lethal baggage. According to DOJ's just-released [national criminal victimization data for 2021](#), Black persons endure a substantially higher rate of serious violent victimization (7.4 per 1,000) than either Whites or Hispanics (each was 5.4).

Oakland



[Oakland's crime data](#) includes street address but not Zip codes. Limiting events to those classified as “murder”, we entered the address of each incident into Google for the Zip. Oakland has [thirteen regular Zip's](#). Excluding one murder in a Zip it shares with another city, it reported 100 murders in 2021. (We ignored

two dozen “homicides” not classified as murders.)

Here’s the scattergram. As in Houston, each dot is a Zip. Although Oakland’s number of “cases” is limited, the relationship between poverty and murder seems well supported. That connection, as well as the disadvantage suffered by Black persons, is evident in a five wealthiest/five poorest comparo (again, Zip’s are in order of poverty):

Oakland’s five most prosperous ZIP’s						
ZIP	Pop.	Pov.	Murd	Rate	White	Black
94611	39042	5.2	0	0	66.3	6.7
94618	17110	5.8	1	5.8	69.3	4.4
94619	24833	6	4	16.1	36.9	22.9
94602	29593	6.8	0	0.0	45.8	15.4
94610	31553	7.1	4	12.7	54.6	16.9
Oakland’s five poorest						
ZIP	Pop.	Pov.	Murd	Rate	White	Black
94603	35486	18.4	10	28.2	15.5	28.9
94607	25723	22.2	7	27.2	28.5	30.4
94601	53104	23	12	22.6	20.7	16.2
94621	33820	23.4	20	59.1	12.8	30.5
94612	16203	23.6	7	43.2	36.6	26

So what’s the takeaway? Houston and Oakland follow the same pattern that we’ve repeatedly observed within cities. [“Don’t “Divest” – Invest!”](#) examined twenty Portland neighborhoods. Its “ten most/least peaceful” comparo essentially duplicates our findings here, and literally everywhere else we’ve looked. And it’s not just “within” cities. That same pattern: more poverty, more crime is also evident in between-city comparisons. Check out [“But is it Really Satan?”](#), which looked at poverty and crime in twenty-one Louisiana cities.

Fine, you say, but what to do? No matter how well done, policing cannot itself “fix” neighborhoods. To be sure, attempts to do so continue. Some are couched under the umbrella of DOJ’s [“Project Safe Neighborhoods.”](#) To its credit, that well-known strategy’s current incarnation goes beyond tough-nosed enforcement. It now articulates a need for “fostering trust and legitimacy in our communities, supporting community-based organizations that help prevent violence from occurring in the first place.”

Yet cops can’t defeat poverty. For *that* conundrum we turn to the [Urban Institute](#). Its landmark study, [“Tackling Persistent Poverty in Distressed Urban Neighborhoods,”](#) offers a splendid approach for developing and instituting “place-conscious strategies” that can rebuild the *human* infrastructure. Their bucketful of to-do’s, which we

discussed in “[Mission Impossible?](#)” includes educational opportunities, job training and apprenticeships, summer jobs for youth, transportation, child care, and physical and mental health resources. And yes, safety *is* important. So police *do* have a role to play. But the solution clearly calls for a lot more than policing.