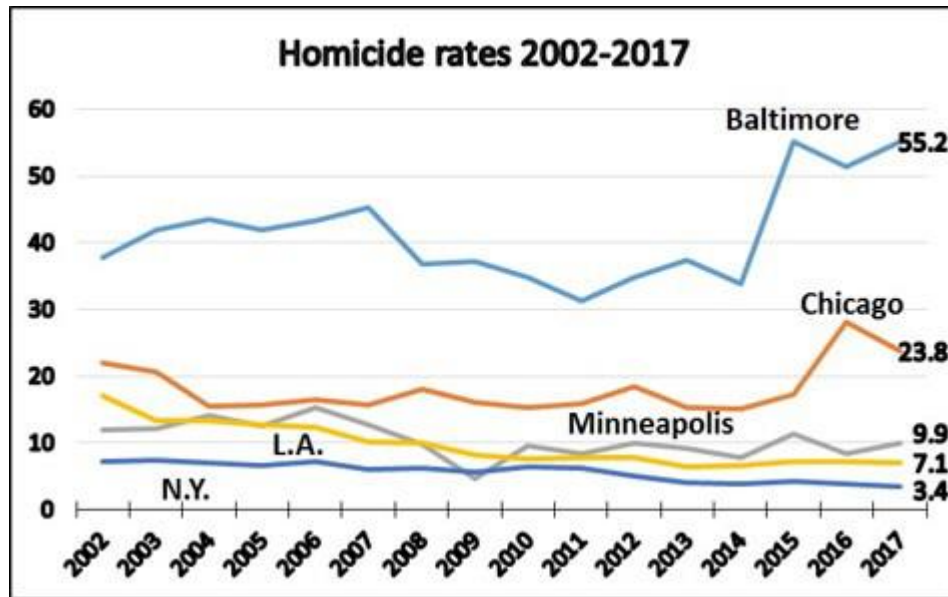


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POLICE SLOWDOWNS (PART I)

Bedeviled by scolding, cops hold back. What happens then?



By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Here's a headline from the July 12, 2018 edition of [USA Today](#): "Baltimore police stopped noticing crime after Freddie Gray's death. A wave of killings followed." As our readers know, [Freddie Gray](#) was the 25-year old Baltimore man who died bouncing around the interior of a prisoner transport van in April 2015. His death led to waves of protests and, most unusually, the prompt (and ultimately unsuccessful) prosecution of the six cops involved. It also spurred DOJ to [open an investigation](#) into Baltimore PD, and particularly of "pedestrian stops, vehicle stops, and arrests from January 2010 to May 2015." Baltimore ultimately entered into a [consent decree](#) requiring, among other things, "robust supervisory review...to ensure that officers apply proper standards when taking these actions."

Our purpose here is to examine how police respond to public slapdowns. And it seems that in Baltimore, and elsewhere, cops reacted in a way that may have further compromised public safety. [USA Today's review](#) of Baltimore police records reveal that self-initiated officer activity – "car stops, drug stops and street encounters" – fell sharply right after the officers were charged, then stayed down:

Where once it was common for officers to conduct hundreds of car stops, drug stops and street encounters every day, on May 4, 2015, three days after city

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prosecutors announced that they had filed charges against six officers over Gray's death, the number fell to just 79. The average number of incidents police reported themselves dropped from an average of 460 a day in March to 225 a day in June of that year....By the end of last year, it was lower still.

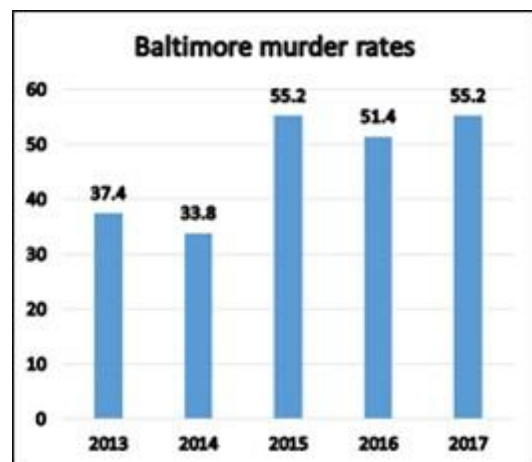
Baltimore's interim chief, Gary Tuggle, readily acknowledged the downturn in activity. "In all candor, officers are not as aggressive as they once were, pre-2015." But he tried to give his department's less enthusiastic approach a positive spin:

We don't want officers going out, grabbing people out of corners, beating them up and putting them in jail. We want officers engaging folks at every level. And if somebody needs to be arrested, arrest them. But we also want officers to be smart about how they do that.

Commissioner Tuggle's comments (they neatly summarize DOJ's recommendations) were apparently taken to heart by his employees. And as they began carefully picking their fights, violence soared. According to the [UCR](#), Baltimore's 2014 violent crime rate was 1338.5 per 100,000 pop., an improvement of about four and one-half percent over the 2013 rate of 1401.2. But in 2015 the rate increased fifteen percent, ending at 1535.9. In 2016 it jumped another sixteen percent, to 1780.4.

Full stop. Our confidence in the accuracy of the violent crime index is low. As we discussed in "[Liars Figure](#)," police departments [including Baltimore](#) have often finagled the numbers. Murder, though, seems less subject to manipulation. And in Baltimore, its trend proved similar. Between 2013 and 2014 killings declined from 233 to 211, a rate decrease of ten percent.

But 2015, the year of the incident, closed out with 344 homicides; the rate, 55.2, was sixty-three percent higher than in 2014. In 2016 the raw number (318) and rate receded a bit. But then things got intolerable. 2017's toll of 343 killings not only [set a local record](#) but confirmed Baltimore as the [second most murderous community](#) above 250,000 population in the U.S.



Did the less vigorous, post-Gray approach "cause" murder to increase? Your blogger's only a half-baked methodologist, so he's reluctant to opine. As they say, correlation is not (necessarily) causation. Was the coincidence between police vigor and crime just a

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quirk? No, said emeritus professor of public policy [Donald Norris](#), formerly of the University of Maryland's Baltimore campus:

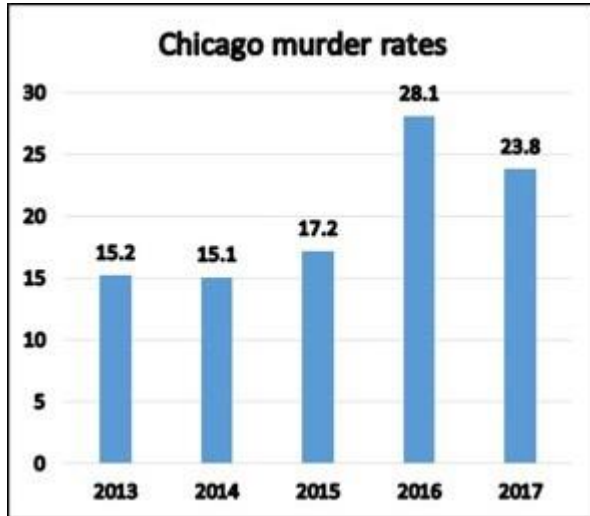
Immediately upon the riot, policing changed in Baltimore, and it changed very dramatically. The outcome of that change in policing has been a lot more crime in Baltimore, especially murders, and people are getting away with those murders.

On October 20, 2014 Chicago PD officer Jason Van Dyke [shot and killed Laquan McDonald](#), a mentally troubled 17-year old black youth who had been wielding a knife. Van Dyke said the youth had threatened him with the weapon, and his account was supported by colleagues. One year later the other shoe dropped. In November 2015, after much cajoling, Chicago finally released the police video. It depicted a stunning scene; far from menacing the cops, McDonald was actually walking away when he was repeatedly shot. Protests quickly engulfed the city, and officer Van Dyke, who as it turns out had been the subject of many complaints, was charged with murder. In 2016 [seven other officers](#) were recommended for firing, and one year after that [three were criminally charged](#) with obstructing justice.

Chicago officials had little choice. As soon as the video came out, [they asked DOJ to step in](#). Instantly, yet another "pattern and practices" investigation was underway. Its [final report](#), issued in January 2017, concluded that Chicago officers "use unnecessary and unreasonable force in violation of the Constitution with frequency, and that unconstitutional force has been historically tolerated by CPD." Among the many observations was that aggressive tactics had led citizens in higher-crime districts to view police as an "occupying force":

At one COMPSTAT meeting we observed, officers were told to go out and make a lot of car stops because vehicles are involved in shootings. There was no discussion about, or apparent consideration of, whether such a tactic was an effective use of police resources to identify possible shooters, or of the negative impact it could have on police-community relations.

City officials [expressed deep support](#) for the report's conclusions. Mayor Rahm Emanuel called it "[a moment of truth for the city](#)." Lori E. Lightfoot, president of the Chicago Police Board, promised to demand "that the reforms happen." One can imagine how cops felt. But how did they respond?



This graph, which depicts UCR data, indicates that Chicago’s murder rate jumped sixty-three percent in 2016. Slowdown believers would attribute that to the video’s release in late 2015. ABC News’ data-rich website [FiveThirtyEight](#) took a close look. Published five months after the video came out, its rich, extensive analysis of Chicago crime and police activity data revealed that between December 2015 (the month following the video’s release) and March 2016 there were 175 murders and about 675 shootings not resulting in death, forty-eight

and seventy-three percent more than during the same period a year earlier. This “severe spike in gun violence” was accompanied by significant declines in arrest rates for homicide (down forty-eight percent) and nonfatal shootings (down sixty-nine percent.) *FiveThirtyEight* concluded that clearly supported the notion of cause and effect:

Even though crime statistics can see a good amount of variation from year to year and from month to month, this spike in gun violence is statistically significant, and the falling arrest numbers suggest real changes in the process of policing in Chicago since the video’s release.

So what changed? Roseanna Ander, of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, suggested that the post-video release atmosphere made officers hesitant about exercising discretion, thus less likely to act proactively. “Certainly they’ll respond to 911 calls...but if you have a group of guys on the corner and you think you have probable cause to stop them and see if one of them has a gun, you’re probably not going to do that.” On the other hand, while a Chicago PD spokesperson agreed that proactivity took a hit, he blamed the downturn on increased paperwork.

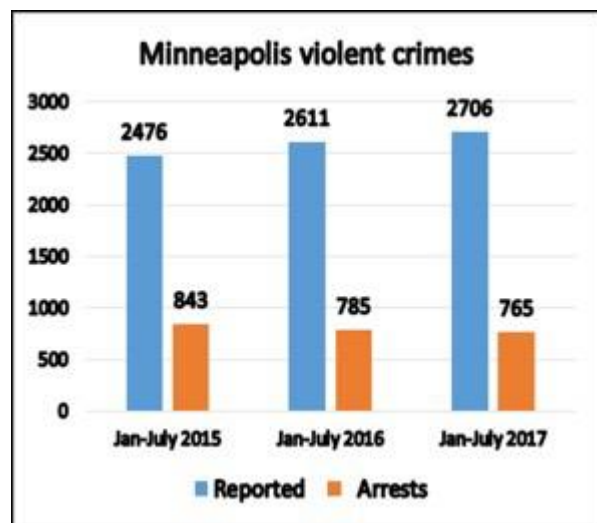
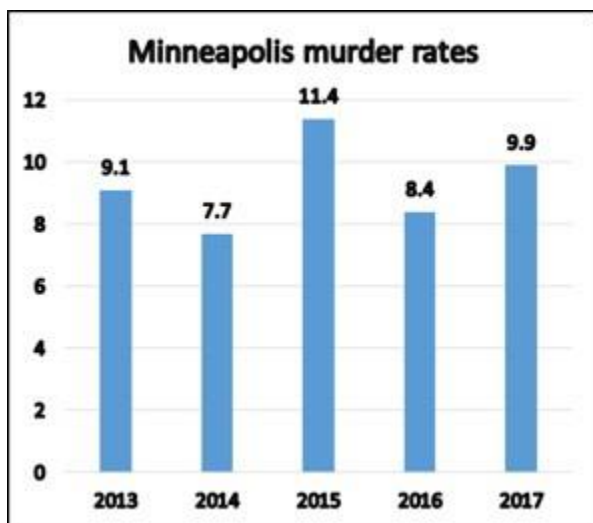
Paperwork? [A recently released study](#), “What Caused the 2016 Chicago Homicide Spike? An Empirical Examination of the ‘ACLU Effect’ and the Role of Stop and Frisks in Preventing Gun Violence,” assessed the impact of various factors that could have led to Chicago’s surge in violence. It ultimately blamed changes in stop-and-frisk practices. In late 2015, to settle an ACLU lawsuit, Chicago began requiring that officers thoroughly

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document each stop-and-frisk on elaborate, highly time-consuming forms. As one might expect, the encounters promptly declined by eighty percent, and the slowdown continued at least through 2016. According to the authors, onerous paperwork was at the root of the steep decrease. As one might expect, [the ACLU sharply disagreed](#) (it called the study “junk science.”)

Baltimore and Chicago are two of the better documented examples of the supposedly criminogenic effects of a police “slowdown.” But cops have slowed down elsewhere. Consider Minneapolis, which occupies the next position on our introductory graph. During a roll call two years ago a police inspector [reportedly “erupted”](#) and accused officers of being “cowards” for participating in a slowdown. To be sure, some things *had* slowed. During January-May 2016, citywide arrests were off by twenty-eight percent, and stop-and-frisks by thirty-two percent compared to the same period in 2015. [Shootings, though, skyrocketed](#), increasing from forty to seventy-four, a deplorable eighty-five percent.

Why had Minneapolis’ finest slowed down? Observers point to several factors, most importantly the severe public reaction to the [November 2015 police killing of Jamar Clark](#), an unarmed black man who allegedly reached for a Minneapolis cop’s gun during a struggle. Months later police were back on the hot seat, this time over the detention at gunpoint of a citizen driving through an area where shots were reportedly fired. (He turned out to be a department store executive and was eventually let go.)



Minneapolis’ murder rates don’t clearly support the notion that a police slowdown

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directly increased violence. While the homicide rate jumped fifty-four percent between 2014-2015, it receded somewhat in 2016, the year following Jamar Clark's killing. (Murder then went up again.) So we broadened the inquiry to include incidence and arrest data for Part I violent crime: murder, aggravated assault, forcible rape and robbery. Equivalent January – July periods for 2015, 2016 and 2017 were compared with [online Minneapolis PD data](#). (These were selected because second-half 2017 numbers are not yet in. Also keep in mind that they report raw numbers, not rates.) What we found supports the Inspector's concern that the slowdown fostered crime: As violence increased, arrests consistently dropped. Coincidentally – or not – both trends came in at 9.3 percent.

Well, time has come for your blogger to “slow down.” Part II will discuss what happened in two supposedly safer places, Los Angeles and New York City, which also experienced slowdowns. We'll bring in confounding factors such as variations in police staffing, and discuss what happens when police get too “enthusiastic.” Then throwing caution to the wind, we'll offer our own, startling recommendations. And as always, stay tuned!