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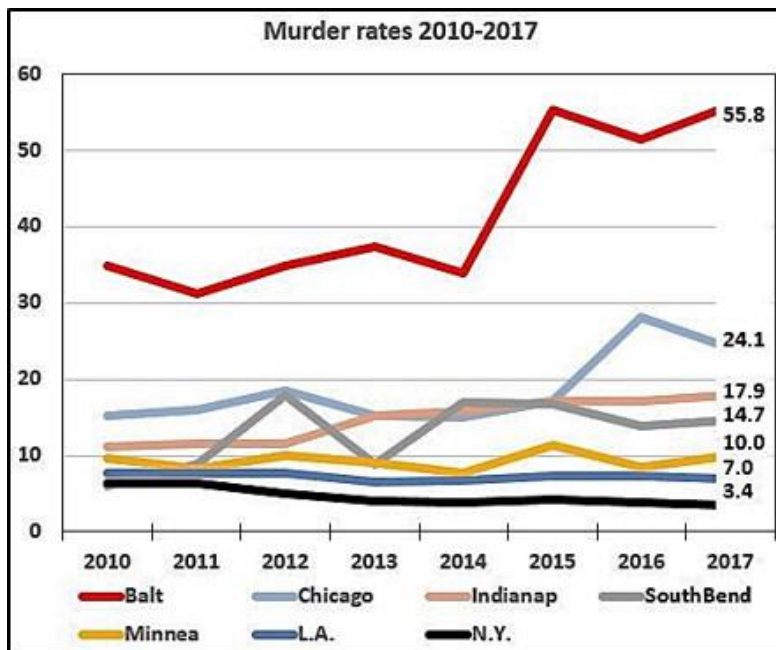
HUMAN RENEWAL

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

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, the city recorded sixteen murders. While a 14.7 rate seems somewhat of an

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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.

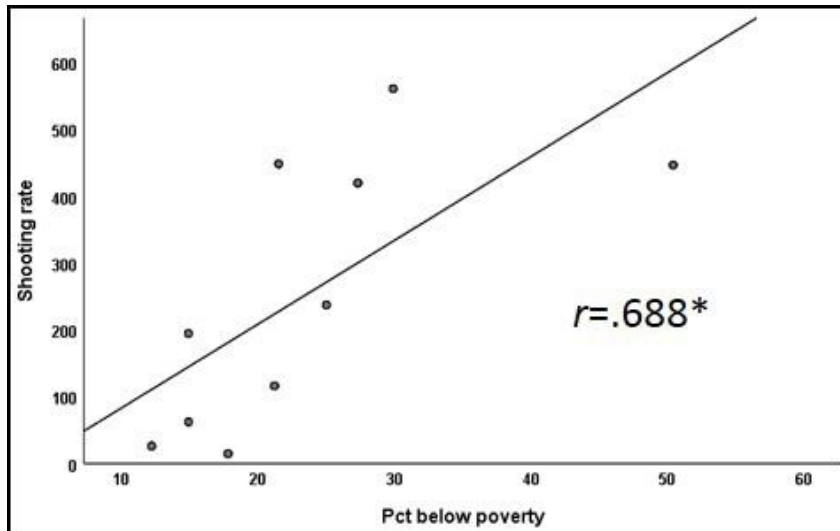
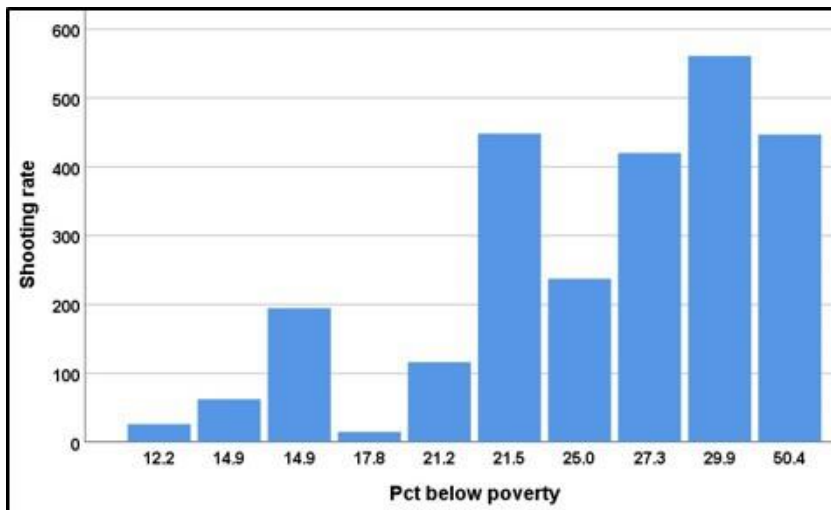
When it comes to building communities, though, poverty is a daunting obstacle. And South Bend's numbers are alarming. According to the [Census](#), 12.4 percent of individuals in the U.S. [fell below the poverty level](#) in 2000, and 14.6 percent in 2017. In South Bend the corresponding figures were [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.)

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.