

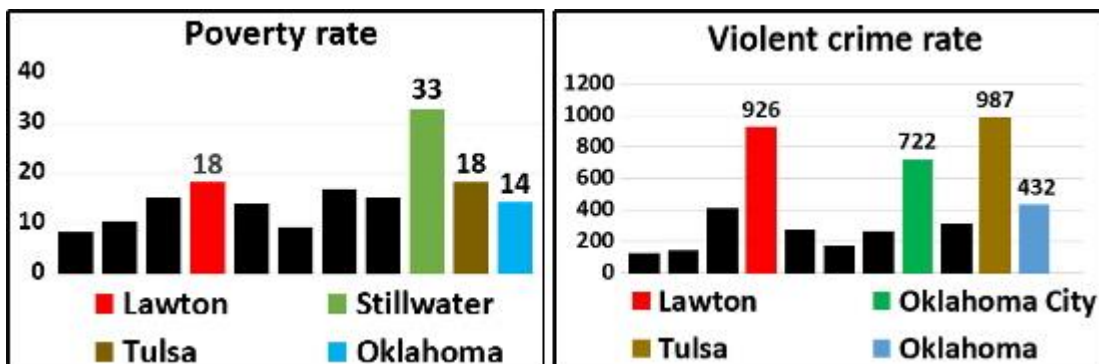
Posted 8/15/22

## WHAT WERE THEY THINKING? AND...WHY?

*Violent communities frighten their inhabitants. And their cops.*

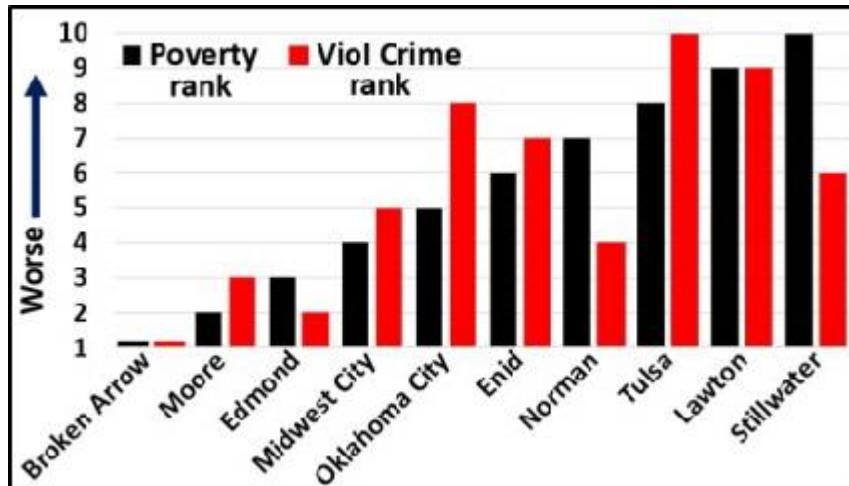


For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Lawton would seem a promising place. With a population just short of one-hundred thousand, the sixth-largest city in Oklahoma is a military/industrial hub, home to Ft. Sill and a major Goodyear plant. Yet with a median household income of \$47,690 and 18.4 percent poverty rate, [Lawton substantially lags](#) behind the “Sooner State’s” \$53,840 MHI and 14.3% poverty rate. Economy-wise, Lawton winds up second-worst of Oklahoma’s ten largest cities.



It’s also second-worst when it comes to violence. [UCR crime data](#) suggests that the community is a truly dangerous place. Lawton’s 2019 violent crime rate of 926/100,000 was more than twice Oklahoma’s 432 and second only to Tulsa’s 987. And when it comes to murder Lawton was the worst of the bunch: its sixteen homicides in 2019 produced a rate of 16.3, well beyond Tulsa’s 13.7 and nearly two and one-half times the state’s 6.7. (We used the UCR as the FBI’s “Crime Data Explorer” remains a work in progress.)

Over the years we’ve repeatedly noted that poverty and violence are closely linked. This graph orders Oklahoma’s ten largest cities by poverty (black bars, least poor on the left). As poverty increases, what’s the trend for violence (red bars)?



Well, Lawton clearly has problems. But why obsess about them? Because on December 5, 2021 the city was the site of a particularly offensive police shooting. Indeed, the bodycam footage is so shocking that we didn't place a copy on our website. (It's available on Lawton PD's YouTube channel. Click [here](#).)

[According to the Comanche County District Attorney](#), Lawton police responded to a caller who said that a man who was the subject of a protective order had entered a residence, was armed with a gun, and wouldn't let the person who obtained the order leave. That intruder turned out to be Quadry Sanders, 29. Officers Robert Hinkle and Nathan Ronan responded. On arrival they used their P.A. to announce their presence. A woman – the “protected” person, Mr. Sanders' wife – shortly exited the home and crossed the street to meet with police.

Mr. Sanders then walked outside and quickly ran back in. The following stills, which we produced from officer bodycam video (Mr. Sanders' head is purposely blurred) show what happened when he left a second time. (Check out the photo of the residence at top. That refrigerator and trash can were in the carport, to the right of the front door.) On this occasion Mr. Sanders is carrying a ball cap (left image). An officer, reportedly Hinkle, approaches, yelling commands. Mr. Sanders turns as if to go back in and the cop's view becomes restricted by the refrigerator (center image). As the officer keeps coming Sanders pauses and his right hand moves to his midsection (right image).



Officer Hinkle instantly sidesteps the appliance and repeatedly fires (four shots, according to the D.A.) Sanders is struck and goes down. As he struggles to rise officer Hinkle fires again, reportedly seven times. Officer Ronan then fires four times. In all, Mr. Sanders was struck by twelve rounds. He died soon after arriving at the hospital. And no, he hadn't been carrying a gun.

Following an investigation by State authorities, [officers Hinkle and Ronan were fired January 7](#). On May 6th. they were charged with manslaughter in the first degree, which is punishable by [a minimum prison term of four years](#). They were released on \$25,000 bond.

We've often probed police shootings. See, for example, our two-parter, "When Must Cops Shoot?" [\(I\)](#) and [\(II\)](#). Cops have limited resources and, often, a dearth of information; especially, accurate information. Yet they're expected to resolve – peacefully, if at all possible – conflicted, rapidly evolving situations. To be sure, that might require they "slow down." And as we harped in "[Speed Kills](#)," taking the time to correctly assess things can work to everyone's benefit. Alas, not all situations afford the luxury of time. There are other complications. Some citizens might be reluctant to comply with police, and a niggling few may prove determined to misbehave. What's more, cops are human, and we know the foibles *that* implies. Given the complexity of their working environment, the availability of guns and other weapons, and, in some communities, the constant drumbeat of violence, it's little wonder that officers will occasionally get it wrong. *Lethally* wrong.

Let's apply some of these concepts to what happened in Lawton. [According to police](#), in addition to mentioning the protective order, the 9-1-1 caller complained that "Sanders was waving a gun inside the house." That was of course passed on to the officers.

*Was the information accurate?* [According to \(former\) cop Hinkle's defense lawyer](#), the officers had been "repeatedly" called to the home because of Mr. Sanders' behavior. They thought that he was reaching for a gun in his pants. And a gun *was* found on a table inside the house.

However, the seemingly compelling Sanders=bad guy scenario may have been somewhat exaggerated. [Local T.V. station KSWO reported](#) that court records indeed confirmed that Mr. Sanders was pending prosecution for spousal abuse. *But the protective order had expired*. In fact, his wife told reporters that the couple intended to reconcile, and that she had asked Mr. Sanders to come over and expel an unwanted visitor. Assumedly, it was that "visitor" – their relationship to Mr. Sanders' wife is to us unknown – who dialed 9-1-1.

Case Number	Name	Date Filed
<a href="#">2011M316(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	10/11/2011
<a href="#">2011M305(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	09/30/2011
<a href="#">2011M289(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	09/12/2011
<a href="#">2011M135(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	05/31/2011
<a href="#">2013M641(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	03/11/2013
<a href="#">2013M421(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	02/19/2013
<a href="#">2012T5255(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	10/10/2012
<a href="#">2011M2081(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	08/04/2011
<a href="#">2010M3614(County)</a>	Sanders, Quadry Malik	12/21/2010

Our review of court files reveals that between 2010 and 2013, while residing in Colorado, Mr. Sanders was repeatedly fined, placed on probation and received brief jail terms for a range of misdemeanor offenses, including criminal mischief, shoplifting, assault,

harassment, disorderly conduct, resisting an officer, flight to avoid prosecution and failure to appear (see left). His misbehavior apparently continued in Oklahoma. A search returned through the [State portal](#) revealed that between February 2015 and October 2021 Mr. Sanders was arrested by Lawton police on at least three occasions for various misdemeanors, including domestic assault and resisting arrest.

Given the officers' prior contacts with Mr. Sanders and what they knew about his past, the man likely presented a threat. Add in what they *thought* they knew – that he had (again!) violated a protective order and was supposedly “waving a gun” – and that hand dropping to the beltline might have acquired special meaning. After all, violence and gunplay are no strangers to Lawton. Neither are threats to police. Indeed, only one year had passed since [officer Ronan had shot and killed an armed man](#).

And that brings us to the cops. [According to KSWO](#), officer Nathan Ronan was a Lawton cop for four years and had no reprimands on file. [Lawton police chief James Smith concluded](#) that the man officer Ronan shot and killed in January 2021, Zonterious Johnson, had exchanged gunfire with another person and, during a subsequent foot chase, threatened officer Ronan with a 9mm. pistol. Officer Ronan's actions were investigated by State agents and local prosecutors and he was cleared of wrongdoing.

Officer Robert Hinkle, who was the first to fire on Mr. Sanders and discharged the most shots, was a five-year veteran. [According to KSWO](#) his disciplinary record consisted of three suspensions, “all of which pertained to damaging a police unit [i.e., a vehicle].”

Mr. Sanders was a Black man. Might race have figured in his killing? Former officer Hinkle, who fired first, is also Black. His partner, former officer Ronan, is White. In [“Black on Black”](#) we discussed the 2019 death of Mr. George Robinson, a Black 62-year old resident of violence-ridden Jackson, Mississippi. Three officers, each a Black man, spotted Mr. Robinson as he apparently sold drugs from his car. Their rough treatment of

Mr. Robinson allegedly caused a fatal brain bleed, [and each cop wound up being charged with second-degree murder](#). ([Two were ultimately acquitted](#) and one was convicted, [but of manslaughter](#).)

Updates to that post mention similar episodes elsewhere. But speculating about race is just that: speculation. Still, it's true that needlessly lethal episodes typically take place in poor, violence-stricken neighborhoods and the victims are often persons of color. Officer skillsets vary, and it may be that some cops, Black and White alike, let their frustrations override their better judgment. Here's a bit of self-plagiarism from "[Black on Black](#)":

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...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?

Ditto, Lawton.