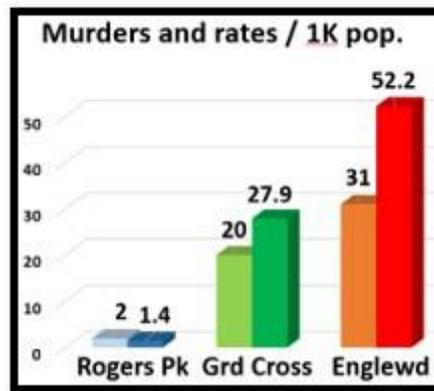


Posted 7/25/22

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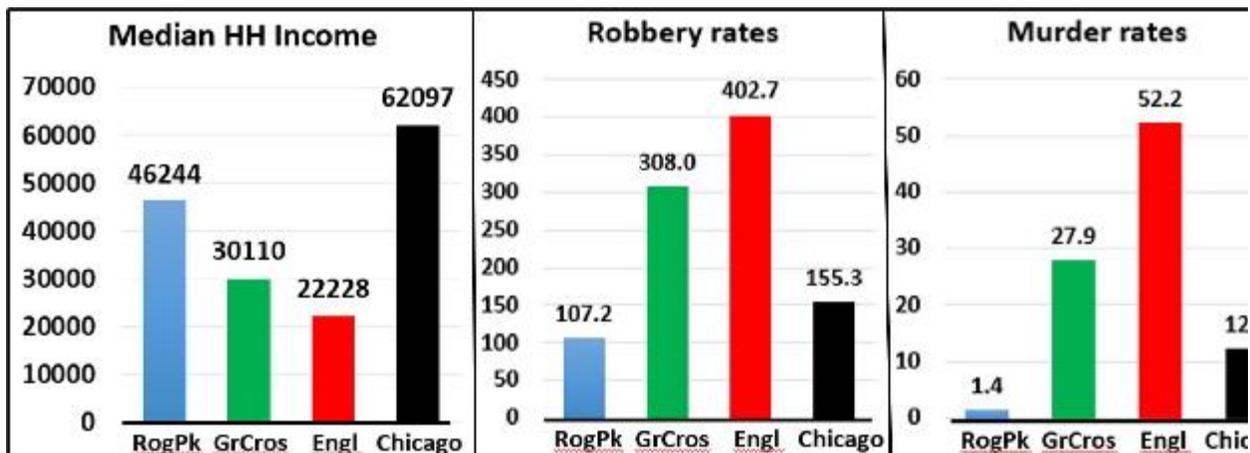
A post-massacre, in-depth [Chicago Tribune piece](#) about Highland Park mentioned the city’s affluence. And, as well, a resident’s annoyance that it mattered:

‘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.



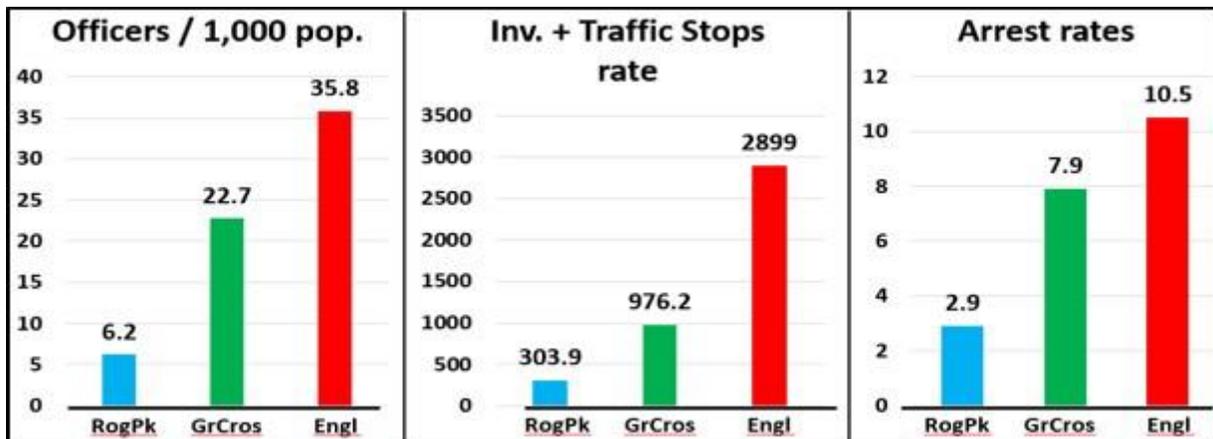
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	Dist	Pop	Robberies	Murders
RogPk	24	138,941	149	2
GrCros	3	71,742	221	20
Engl	7	59,346	239	31
Chicago		2,171,197	4189	334

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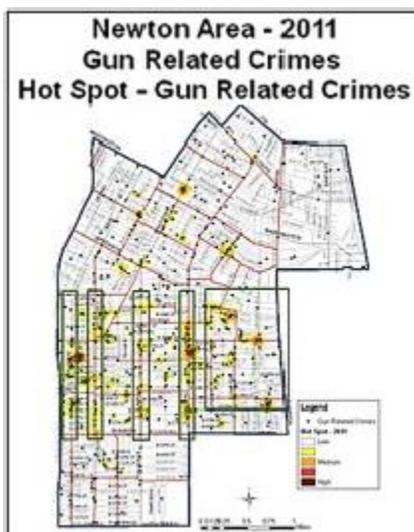
	Dist	Pop	Ofc	Inv Stops	Tfc Stops	Both	Arrests
RogPk	24	138,941	864	11282	30937	42219	396
GrCros	3	71,742	1632	12233	57798	70031	565
Engl	7	59,346	2126	32439	139601	172040	625

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.

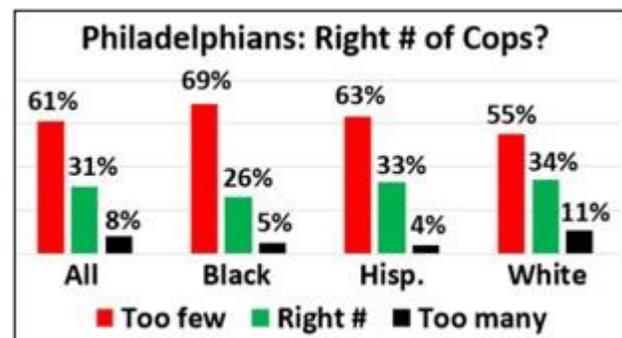
Lower-income Chicagoans aren’t the only Americans who feel frustrated over their perceived abandonment by city hall. Let’s dial it back three years. Here’s what a resident of a poor, violence-plagued Baltimore neighborhood had to say about her visit to a “well-off area”:

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!