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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

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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.

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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!