

## TAKE OVER? TAKE CARE!

Julius Wachtel

Nine years ago, while campaigning for his first term, then-candidate Trump railed against Hillary and the Dem's during a large gathering at Charlotte's famed "city square." Describing some inner cities as "more dangerous than some of the war zones that we're reading about and seeing about every night," [he promised, once elected](#), to promptly issue "a federal disaster designation for blighted communities in order to initiate the rebuilding of vital infrastructure, the demolition of abandoned properties and the increased presence of law enforcement..."

No such "designations" were made during President Trump's first term. Economic disparities, though, seemingly remained on his plate. Shortly after assuming office America's new leader signed a "[Tax Cuts and Jobs Act](#)" that offered incentives for investing in 9,000 low-income "Opportunity Zones." Affordable housing projects already benefitted from Federal subsidies, but the tweak presumably helped.

President Trump's tenor changed dramatically at the beginning of his second term. Issued on August 11, 2025, Presidential Executive Order "[Declaring a Crime Emergency in the District of Columbia](#)" asserted that a "precipitous rise in violent crime" threatened every law-abiding person in the capital city with being "violently attacked" or "fatally shot":

In 2024, the District of Columbia averaged one of the highest robbery and murder rates of large cities nationwide. Indeed, [it] now has a higher violent crime, murder, and robbery rate than all 50 States...The District of Columbia is, by some measures, among the top 20 percent of the most dangerous cities in the world.

D.C.'s Home Rule Act authorizes the Attorney General to take temporary control over the district's police function. While D.C. cops still seem to be "in charge," a phalanx of Federal agents and over *two-thousand* National Guard troops (they're packing guns) have come in to lend a very visible hand. President Trump signaled his intention to extend like treatment to a number of other "bluish" cities, including Chicago, Baltimore and New Orleans.

It's not that our cities can't use some help. [According to the FBI](#), the U.S. suffered 16,935 killings in 2024, producing a national murder rate of 5.0 per 100,000 pop. But the cities picked on by President Trump face far more onerous situations. Going from bad to appalling, Chicago's 580 murders in 2024 produced a rate of 22.0, *more than four times* the U.S. average. D.C. had 187 murders, yielding a rate of 26.6. New Orleans suffered 124 murders, for a rate of 34.2. And Baltimore's 197 killings yielded a rate of 34.8, about *seven times* that of the U.S. as a whole.

Alas, each of those cities has signaled that the Feds are unwelcome. So for now, the President's turned his attention to a seemingly more accepting place. With 197 murders last year, producing a rate of 31.3/100,000, more than *six times* that of the U.S., Memphis might indeed benefit from some quality attention. So, what form might that take? And, most importantly, how would it be *distributed*?

That called for a deep dive into the city's crime numbers. Fortunately, Memphis' online [Public Safety portal](#) offers more than a decade's worth of crime data. Census population numbers were used to generate murder, aggravated assault and robbery rates (per/1,000 residents) for each of the city's 29 residential Zip codes. Census poverty estimates were then applied to produce two sets of neighborhoods. Memphis' ten most prosperous Zip's (pop. 274,048, average poverty 7.9%) had per/1,000 murder, aggravated assault and robbery rates of .05, 2.9 and 0.6, respectively. Their ten most poverty-stricken counterparts (pop. 247,829, avg. pov. 33.5%) carried corresponding rates of 0.52, 15.8 and 4.3. That's from about *five to ten times* worse.

Two years ago your writer [found the same crime-poverty connection](#) in 2022 Memphis data. As he long has for cities throughout the U.S. Consider, for example, the nation's most populous burg – New York City. (Yes, it's also “blue,” and has also drawn the President's ire.) [Its 2024 murder rate](#) of 4.5/100,000 pop. actually “beats” the nation's 5.0. But [some of its poorer neighborhoods](#) have homicide rates *more than three times worse* the citywide number.

So, what to do? Should troops take a deep dive into Memphis' poorest neighborhoods? Here's a message for both the “Reds” *and* the “Blues”, and not just in Memphis. Set ideology aside. Take a deep but *thoughtful* dive into our neglected places. Make a concerted effort to provide poverty-stricken individuals and families with child care, tutoring, educational opportunities, job training, health services and adequate housing. Bottom line: for the current Administration, and for all that will follow, fixing neighborhoods truly remains Job #1.

After all, it's not about “taking over” communities. It's about taking care of their inhabitants.

Julius Wachtel, a retired Federal agent and university lecturer, regularly posts essays on crime and justice at <https://policeissues.org>. One of his recent essays about poverty and crime is at <https://www.policeissues.org/Baltimore.pdf>. For more about him and for links to his published writings, see <https://juliuswachtel.com/>.

Links for numbered references:

- (1) <https://rollcall.com/factbase/transcript/donald-trump-speech-charlotte-nc-october-26-2016/>
- (2) <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/using-home-htf-funds-within-opportunity-zones/the-essentials-of-oz-home-htf-programs/opportunity-zones-101-basics/what-are-ozs/>
- (3) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/08/declaring-a-crime-emergency-in-the-district-of-columbia/>
- (4) <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>
- (5) <https://publicsafety.memphistn.gov/>
- (6) <https://www.policeissues.org/Memphis.pdf>
- (7) [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis\\_and\\_planning/historical-crime-data/seven-major-felony-offenses-2000-2024.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis_and_planning/historical-crime-data/seven-major-felony-offenses-2000-2024.pdf) (citywide)  
[https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis\\_and\\_planning/historical-crime-data/seven-major-felony-offenses-by-precinct-2000-2024.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis_and_planning/historical-crime-data/seven-major-felony-offenses-by-precinct-2000-2024.pdf) (by precinct)